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The Baltic Cobra Effect:
Security Issues Stemming from Ethnic Russian Populations

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The Baltic Cobra Effect:
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Abstract

The Baltic Cobra Effect:
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This thesis uses a qualitative historic analysis to understand the nature of the security threat posed to the Baltic States by the Russian Federation. It analyzes Russian foreign policy and actions in conjunction with Baltic security responses and laws to reveal a security dilemma stemming from ethnic Russian populations in the Baltics whose vulnerability to Russian influence are increased, rather than decreased, by Baltic responses. Finally, this thesis proposes possible policy solutions the United States might pursue to mitigate this threat beyond the use of purely military means and prevent the ability of Russia to threaten the Baltic States and the NATO security alliance.

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Chapter I: Introduction, Methodology and Literature Review

The United States is failing to adequately prevent and counter the threat of Russian interference and influence in the Baltic States of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, which are NATO allies and situated in a strategically important geographic location between the Russian Federation and the rest of Europe. However, in recent years the most likely avenue through which Russia would likely interfere with and destabilize the Baltic States is through "Gray Zone" tactics; that is, operating in a realm of conflict in the murky area between war and peace, by exploiting ethnic Russians residing within the Baltics. This situation presents a multifaceted dilemma for United States policy-makers and the Baltic States themselves. After emerging from the Soviet Union, the Baltic States established new national identities based upon their native ethnicities and languages, largely to the exclusion of their ethnic Russian populations. Furthermore, as the Baltic States remain wary of the Russian Federation and their own Russian populations, they are not universally eager to better integrate their ethnic Russian minorities into social and political society or government. The results of such policies are varying degrees of disenfranchisement and marginalization for the ethnic Russians in the Baltic States, who are often not citizens, where the Russian language is not recognized as an official language and where they cannot fully participate in government. The result is that the ethnic Russian populations have legitimate grievances regarding their status within their new homelands, which increases the risk that Russia can and may exploit them in order to destabilize the Baltic States. The "cobra effect," a situation in which a solution exacerbates the problem it was supposed to solve, refers to this self-affirming security dilemma for the Baltic States in that, out of concern for national security, they do not wish to improve the legal and social rights and powers of ethnic Russians residing within

their borders, yet by not doing so they increase the risk posed by these populations. Furthermore, as this security dilemma resides largely within the domestic sphere of the Baltic States, the United States is significantly limited in its ability to address this security issue through traditional military or diplomatic means, despite the fact that preventing a conflict in this region is a significant national interest for the United States due to the far-reaching impacts of conflict.

Research in this paper focuses on trying to answer several key questions: First, how and why do Russia and ethnic Russians pose a risk for the Baltic States and how have their varying levels of integration either improved or worsened the situation over time? Second, how have the Baltic governments and US policy historically tried to counter or resolve this security dilemma and how successful have such efforts been? Finally, given the domestic nature of the problem which precludes significant and direct diplomatic influence, what are possible options for US and NATO policy-makers to remedy the vulnerability of the Baltic States to Russian influence due to their ethnic Russian minorities?

METHODOLOGY

In order to answer these questions, I have chosen to use the qualitative methods of historical and policy analysis beginning from the independence of the Baltic States from the Soviet Union to the present, incorporating multiple sources of documentation. In order to understand the risk posed by both Russia and ethnic Russians within the Baltic States I focused upon reporting of Russian provocations, statements from key Russian leadership figures, Russian policy documents and the history of Russian exploitation of ethnic Russians in neighboring states as a tool of foreign policy. To understand how the

Baltic governments and the US have responded to this enduring security issue I focused upon Baltic government security and policy documents, reporting and publications on United States policy actions focused upon the Baltics, and the evolution of Baltic State laws and policies impacting their ethnic Russian populations such as citizenship rights and requirements and language policies. Based on this research I draw my conclusions on what variables are likely to remedy or resolve the security dilemma and recommend possible policy options available to the United States to affect the changes necessary to promote or realize those solutions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

I chose to conduct a literature review focused on the histories of the Baltic States in order to gain an understanding of their unique geopolitical and cultural attributes leading to their independence from the Soviet Union. Accordingly, I chose three books by expert scholars of the Baltic States: *Constructing Post-Soviet Geopolitics in Estonia* by Pami Aalto, *The Making of Modern Lithuania* by Tomas Balkelis, and *History of Latvia: 100 Years* by Daina Bleiere, Ilgvars Butulis, Inesis Feldmanis, Aivars Stranga and Antonijs Zunda. This research revealed all three of the ethnic Baltic populations hold strong ethno-linguistic identities. Additionally, the Latvians, Lithuanians and Estonians have a firm desire for securing their own states which, due to their geographic location between Russia and successive German empires, have maintained only brief periods of independence and spent the majority of their history occupied by great power states.

The Estonian people's history is one of occupation, leading to their strong sentiments of independence, nationalism and chafing at the intrusion of external entities.

Ethnic Estonians did not know independence until 1918, having previously been occupied by the Bolsheviks, Germans and Imperial Russia until being returned to Soviet rule in 1940 under terms of the Hitler-Stalin Pact.[1] Once gaining independence again with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Estonians were quick to re-establish their own sovereign state. However, in the creation of a nation-state based on ethnic identity, the large number of ethnic Russians living in Estonia have been left severely disadvantaged in economic and societal opportunity. This has resulted in a state which is overwhelmed with conflicting geopolitical and identity issues: Estonians view themselves as more Western as their border with Russia was the traditional border between Western and Eastern Christianity, they have a long history of Russia annexing them, yet the large Russian minority group still sees their cultural ties with Russia and receives support from Russia to improve their conditions within Estonia.[2]

Similar to the nationalist issues in the Estonian state, Lithuania had a history of Russian rule fixed in the minds of its crafters. "Behind the newly created state structures stood the generation of the Lithuanian intelligentsia who gained their early political experience in the associational network of patriotic relief institutions in Russia.".[3] It existed as part of Tsarist Russia's extended empire until it gained its independence in 1918 and quickly formed a state based on the Lithuanian ethnic identity.[4] By the end of World War II, however, Nazi and Soviet occupations had destroyed the state, caused an outflow of ethnic Lithuanian refugees, and its territory once again falling under Russian rule.[5] Furthermore, their history as war refugees and struggle against the military

[1] P. Aalto. *Constructing Post-Soviet Geopolitics in Estonia*, (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2003), 14.
[2] Ibid., 30.
[3] T. Balkelis. *The Making of Modern Lithuania*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2009), 124.
[4] Ibid., xxiv.
[5] Ibid., xxv.

predations of other nations only served to reinforce the ethno-nationalist identity of the Lithuanian people when forming their newly independent state in 1990.[6]

Finally, Latvians have a similar history of near-persistent subjugation by outside powers. Like the other Baltic states, Latvia had the geopolitical misfortune of finding itself wedged between great military empires, leading to constant foreign subjugation by successive German, Swedish, Danish, Livonian, Polish and Russian empires from the 13th Century.[7] Like Lithuania, it finally gained true independence in 1918 and formed an ethno-nationalist state for the Latvian people, only to face the same fate in 1940 with successive Nazi and Soviet occupations resulting in its absorption by the Soviet Union.[8] Like Lithuania and Estonia, difficulties in naturalization for ethnic Russians and the lack of state recognition for the use of the Russian language created social divisions between the two groups.[9]

All three states emerged from the Soviet Union with similar histories. All three of the ethnic Baltic peoples had endured centuries of subjugation by imperial powers, had previously established ethno-nationalist states only to lose them to war and subsequent annexation by the Soviet Union, and had experienced attempts at Russification by both Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union. As a result, upon gaining independence, the new Baltic States had these experiences to draw upon when reforming themselves as independent states. These histories also explain why the Baltic States have a sensitivity to threats, real and perceived, from the Russian Federation.

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[6] Ibid., 119.
[7] D. Bleiere et al. *History of Latvia: 100 Years*, (Riga: Jumava, 2014), 9.
[8] Ibid., 2.
[9] Ibid., 460.

Chapter II: Threat Perceptions of the Baltic States

Russia is the primary threat to the security of the Baltic States. In 2006 Alexander Dugin, then an advisor to Putin's United Russia party and the creator of the "Eurasianist" ideology[10] stated "For the moment, our priorities are not in the Baltic region. In a way, one could say that the latter is an unresolved question in the short term, although in the long term Russia will never accept it. The Eurasian construction assumes a new statute for the Baltic region – either friendly towards Moscow, or neutral. Russia will never reach a mutual understanding with an Atlanticist Baltic region."[11] Russia has undertaken aggressive actions to undermine Baltic States' sovereignty, engaged in aggressive rhetoric towards its Western-leaning neighbors, demonstrated a renewed interest in territorial expansion, and pursued a strategy of undermining non-compliant states in its near abroad through the manipulation of ethnic minorities. Furthermore, it is possible Russia could instigate a low-level conflict in the Baltics in an attempt to undermine and fracture the NATO alliance. According to the Foreign Policy Research Institute, "If Russia challenges these countries' territorial integrity and NATO fails to honor its Article V security guarantees, this would spell the end of the post-World War II international security order."[12]

The Baltic States are NATO members, so there is the risk of Russian meddling reaching a point that one of the Baltic States could invoke Article V of the alliance's security guarantees, yet the willingness of NATO members to commit to military action

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[10] Shaun Walker, "Ukraine and Crimea: what is Putin thinking?" The Guardian, 23 March 2014. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/mar/23/ukraine-crimea-what-putin-thinking-russia

[11] M. Herpen, Russia's nuclear threats and the security of the Baltic states. *Cicero Foundation Great Debate Paper* (Vol 16, Iss 05, 2016), 12-13.

[12] A. Grigas. "Russia's Motives in the Baltic States," Foreign Policy Research Institute, 7 December 2015, 2. https://www.fpri.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/grigas_-_russian_motives.pdf

in such an instance is questionable.[13] Among NATO's original members there is little solidarity when it comes to protection of the Baltic States[14], an issue highlighted when Germany initially refused to contribute troops to bolster Baltic garrisons in 2017.[15] Thus the United States has a vested interest in preventing a conflict in the Baltics, as it risks fracturing the NATO alliance. How and why would Russia risk interfering with NATO member states in an aggressive manner and why would it involve the ethnic Russian populations of the Baltic States?

RUSSIAN INTENTIONS IN ITS NEAR ABROAD

After the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia appeared to be lacking a sense of identity and place within the world, but in the 21st century, Vladimir Putin gave direction to a wayward nation which began a resurgence in economic growth and international standing.[16] With this growth in power, Putin, by many accounts a consummate realist thinker, directed the energies of the state with an ideology of Russian exceptionalism and began to base national interests not on the realist needs for state survival, nor even the deepening of ties within a liberalist world order, but rather on the Eurasianist concept of Russia as a unique civilization within the world which must act as a counterbalance to Western institutions and values.[17]

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[13] Pew Research Center, "Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe," 10 May 2017, 133. https://www.pewforum.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2017/05/CEUP-FULL-REPORT.pdf

[14] R. Thornton & M. Karagiannis, "The Russian Threat to the Baltic States: The Problems of Shaping Local Defense Mechanisms," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* (Vol 29, Iss 3, 2016), 341.

[15] Ibid.

[16] G. Evans & C. Lipsmeyer. The democratic experience in divided societies: the Baltic states in comparative perspective. *Journal of Baltic Studies*, (Vol 32, Iss 4, 2013), 379-401.

[17] A. S. Bowen & M. Galeotti. Putin's Empire of the Mind. Foreign Policy, 2014. http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/21/putin_s_empire_of_the_mind_russia_geopolitics

Because these national interests are based on ideological concepts, as opposed to rational goals of a state within an international order, Russia pursues interventions in neighboring states which pose ideological threats.[18] The results so far, have included the expansion of the Russian state into Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014. This expansion, dissimilar to the types of imperialism seen by Tsarist Russia or the Soviet Union, is bred from a sense of threat to Russian civilization.[19] This viewpoint requires action borne not out of rational interests, but those established by an ideology.

Analysis of Russian foreign policy in the 21st century will often consider these actions as based out of a realist view of the state system,[20]but its actions are driven by its Eurasianist ideology. Russian expansion is a direct result of perceived threats to itself which appears to be almost the definition of a realist impetus for Russian action in its near abroad,[21] but it was threats to its perception of Russian civilization, as opposed to security threats, which drove these actions. By examining how the new Russian ideology shapes Russia's perceptions of its national interests and goals it becomes clear that ideology, and not realism, drives its foreign policy.

This can be directly examined by analyzing the degree to which ideology plays a part in the decision-making of Russian leaders and comparing that to Russian expansion into Georgia and Ukraine, where force and annexation were the means to achieve ideological objectives while accepting costs that a rational state leader would have

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[18] M. R. Freire & R. E. Kanet. *Russia and Its Near Neighbours*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 22.
[19] A. S. Bowen & M. Galeotti. Putin's Empire of the Mind. Foreign Policy, 2014. http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/21/putin_s_empire_of_the_mind_russia_geopolitics
[20] E. Souleimanov. *Understanding Ethnopolitical Conflict: Karabakh, South Ossetia, and Abkhazia Wars Reconsidered*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 158.
[21] P. B. Rich. *Crisis in the Caucasus*, (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2013), 2.

otherwise avoided. The reason such a distinction must be made is to understand the danger posed to the current international order by Russia's ideology-based foreign policy decisions. While similar 'rogue states' exist, they are in large part contained and do not pose a threat to the overall international order. Russia, however, as a rising great power could pose a significant risk to the survival of the liberal international order if unchecked.

Russian ideology as crafted by Putin does not depict Russia necessarily as a balancer as defined in classical realism but is rather more reminiscent of the Cold War ideology that Western democracy poses a threat to Russian civilization.[22] The threat now, however, is to Russia's pursuit of 'sovereign democracy' through a sense of Russian exceptionalism which became an absolute necessity in reaction to the colored revolutions witnessed in the early 2000s. It is important to differentiate the fact that Putin views this as a threat to both Russian civilization and the Russian state, as his idea of Russian civilization expands beyond the borders of Russia and into the territories of its neighbors in the near abroad.[23]

One of the key aspects of Putin's new ideology is the concept of paternalism, that is, the need for Russia to provide a guiding role in its dealings with the former Soviet states, which also necessitates that these states accept Russian authority.[24] Official Russian policy has vacillated between referring to the near abroad as a sphere of influence or a realm of 'privileged interest' to Russia, but the intended meaning is the same: only Russia should have the right and authority to exert influence and, if necessary,

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[22] A. S. Bowen & M. Galeotti. Putin's Empire of the Mind. Foreign Policy, 2014. http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/21/putin_s_empire_of_the_mind_russia_geopolitics

[23] R. E. Kanet. *Russian foreign policy in the 21st century*, (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 83.

[24] H. M. H. Van. *Putin's Wars: The Rise of Russia's New Imperialism*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2014), 246.

intervene in the former Soviet republics.[25] A clear example of this form of interference is Russia's attempt to influence the 2004 Ukrainian elections to install a Russia-friendly leader in one of its neighboring countries. The resulting failure to maintain a friendly regime through soft power would cause Russia to realize a threat to their ideology, and the possible necessity to use more than soft power to ensure its interests later.[26] While the reasoning for influencing the elections of Ukraine could be viewed as meeting rational goals such as ensuring security and trade arrangements with a geographically important neighbor, the resulting fear of Western democratic influence was more a result of a threat to Russian ideology.

In failing to influence a key neighbor, Putin felt Russia was at risk, not because the new regime in Ukraine posed a significant military or economic risk (although the possibility of joining NATO did give reason for concern) but rather because Russia viewed Ukraine as similar to itself and a Western-influenced revolution against a similar government gave rise to fears that its own ideologically-based take on democracy could be at risk.[27] Putin's reaction was to further consolidate the ideology of Russian 'sovereignty' from the West within foreign and domestic policy and to begin a significant effort to both strengthen the patriotic feeling of the Russian people and limit the influence of foreign actors.[28] Putin's ideology relied on the need for the Russian people to take their

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[25] R. E. Kanet. *Russian foreign policy in the 21st century*, (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 147.
[26] A. Umland. Varieties of Russian Exceptionalism in Putin's Russia. *Russian Politics & Law*, (Vol 50, Iss 6, 2012), 3-6.
[27] A. Evans. Power and Ideology: Vladimir Putin and the Russian Political System. *The Carl Beck Papers In Russian And East European Studies*, (Iss 1902, 2008), 43.
[28] R. E. Kanet. *Russian foreign policy in the 21st century*, (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 21-22.

own path in determining the future of their state and the Russian civilization as a whole, since adopting Western principles would inherently weaken their independence.

To this end, Putin enacted multiple regulations to limit the effects of foreign influence, such as restricting the actions of foreign NGOs or foreign funding of domestic NGOs which had played a part in the failure of Russian influence in the 2004 Ukrainian elections, as well as cultivating his ideology of Russian exceptionalism within society.[29] He aimed to increase and consolidate the power of his own role as well as that of the ideological precepts on which the Russian society was to be based by encouraging the tenets of 'vertical power' and 'sovereign democracy' to be viewed as inherent traits of a Russian-based system.[30] In this process of defining Russia's innate exceptionalism, he increasingly encouraged the view that Russia was not defined by a single state, but by its culture, language, history and morals. In doing so he enhanced the idea that Russia is a civilization, and not limited to a single nation. This gave Russia the moral justification for influence in the near abroad, as the former Soviet republics not only had ethnically Russian populations as a result of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, but also they were 'brother' states tied together by a common history spanning hundreds of years; sentiments echoed and enhanced by Putin's United Russia party and its clubs.[31] This promotes the perception of Russia as the seat of power within Eurasia; power which is a product of and exercised through ideology as opposed to purely materiel means.

Russian identity plays a fundamental role in the formulation of foreign policy by Russia. The Russian 'civilization' extends beyond the borders of Russia into those of its

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[29] A. Evans. Power and Ideology: Vladimir Putin and the Russian Political System. *The Carl Beck Papers In Russian And East European Studies*, (Iss 1902), 21.
[30] H. M. H. Van. *Putin's Wars: The Rise of Russia's New Imperialism*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2014), 57.
[31] Ibid., 118-119.

neighbors in the near abroad and thus is a factor in determining policy whose goals are to realize the interests of Russia.[32] This leads to conflicting internal/international interests as reflected by policies such as 'passportization,' whereby Russia has used the basis of ethnicity to issue citizenship to members of non-Russian states beginning in the early 2000s, in which Russia grants Russian citizenship to ethnic Russians residing in FSU republics to ensure it retains a stake and reason for involvement within these regions.[33] While such action may be a tactic by Russia to instigate conflict both in Georgia and Ukraine, it is not a legitimizing issue for instigating conflict,[34] but rather speaks to the concept of Russia as a civilization instead of just a single state. Furthermore, Russia has described its duty to protect all Russians wherever they may be. This may sound like an echo of US policy to protect US citizens wherever they are, but with the twist that not all Russians are citizens, as Russia's "passportization" process underscores. This is one of the ways in which Russian internal and international interests overlap, as protection must be guaranteed, but Russia sees itself as a civilization, and thus by guaranteeing security of all Russians this provides for significant security interests and involvement in neighboring states who have large populations of ethnic Russians.[35] This overlap in the near abroad creates difficulties for Russia when distinguishing policy that is either internal or international because the Russian identity does not hinge on the state. The inability to differentiate 'us' from 'them' in the near abroad provides the context from

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[32] A. S. Bowen & M. Galeotti. Putin's Empire of the Mind. Foreign Policy, 2014. http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2014/21/putin_s_empire_of_the_mind_russia_geopolitics

[33] S. Secrieru. The Transnistrian conflict – new opportunities and old obstacles for trust building (2009–2010), *Journal Of Southeast European & Black Sea Studies*, (Vol 11, Iss 3, 2011), 241-263.

[34] R. D. Asmus. *A little war that shook the world: Georgia, Russia, and the future of the West*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 42.

[35] M. R. Freire & R. E. Kanet. *Russia and Its Near Neighbours*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 43-44.

which Russia developed national interests in its neighboring states which directly conflict with the basic needs of those states' survival, sovereignty and autonomy, in the international system and provides for the justification of Russia's 'paternal' approach to these states.

RUSSIAN LEVERS OF INFLUENCE IN THE BALTICS

Russia's increase in political, economic and military influence upon the Baltic states, coupled with its recently demonstrated willingness to intervene militarily in neighboring states which contain ethnic Russian populations, has created a credible threat that Russia will, at the least, interfere in their self-determination and, at worst, consider the use of military force to destabilize or even attempt to re-incorporate the Baltic states into the Russian Federation. Russian influence is not an unexpected phenomenon in the Baltic states. Their geographic position between Russia, its ally Belarus, the Baltic Sea and Russia's Kaliningrad Oblast, means these neighboring states are unavoidable when it comes to Russia's policies in its near abroad. Under the leadership of Putin, however, Russia has become more aggressively involved in the internal affairs of the Baltic states than would be expected from the political and economic necessity of dealing with one's neighbors.

First, Russia has demonstrated a significant ability to influence the Russian populations of the Baltic states. News from the Russian Federation in the Baltics is the primary Russian-language media which provides an extremely pro-Russian narrative to the ethnic Russian minorities in the Baltic states. In addition, the penetration of Russian NGOs, Russophile-based political parties and "cultural centers" which demonstrate politically driven goals in line with the Russian state all grant Russia influence within the

Baltic States.[36] Currently, the Baltic States have not developed significant Russian-language media or political outreach programs to reach out to their own minority populations and provide opposing points of view, which has allowed the Russian government to greatly influence how these populations view the world and, significantly, their own situation. Russia leverages these populations for its policy objectives and, dangerously, provides Russia the same point of access it has previously used in Ukraine and Georgia to cause internal instability and justification for intervention.

Russian military exercises and actions have acted as thinly veiled threats to the Baltic states signaling that, should they stray too far from the influence of Russia, they would be especially vulnerable to outright military aggression. Russian military movements, such as the ZAPAD maneuvers, are military exercises which, in 2009 and 2013, were conducted as full-scale simulations explicitly aimed at fighting NATO and invading the Baltic states.[37] These exercises provide a clear signal to the governments of the Baltic states that even their membership in NATO would not save them from an existential threat. From 2013 to 2014 alone, Russian military maneuvers along Latvia's borders increased fivefold, leading to more than 250 border incidents and performing exercises to simulate air and sea blockades of the Baltic region.[38] These maneuvers serve as more than regular training for the maintenance of military forces but also to establish Russian power as the most imminent and influential military power in the region, which Russia uses to its advantage in the political arena when dealing with its neighbors. It also demonstrates a credible threat to the Baltic states that there continues to exist the

[36] G. Pridham. Time to bolster the Baltic states. *The World Today*, (Vol 71, Iss 4, 2015), 40-41.
[37] S. Blank. What do the Zapad 2013 exercises reveal (part two), *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, (Vol 10, Iss 180, 2013).
[38] G. Pridham. Time to bolster the Baltic states. *The World Today*, (Vol 71, Iss 4, 2015), 40.

possibility of Russian forces being demonstrably capable of succeeding in an invasion, which provides a chilling backdrop to any diplomatic overtures the Russian government chooses to make.

Aside from just military exercises, the Russian government has also taken more overt actions to make it clear to the Baltic states that Russia cannot be dismissed simply because of their membership within NATO or the European Union. In 2015, Russian operatives abducted an Estonian intelligence officer from Estonian territory, charged him with espionage in Russia and sentenced him to 15 years in prison until Estonia agreed to a prisoner swap with its bullish neighbor.[39] Russia also demonstrated its ability to flout international law when, in 2014, the Russian Coast Guard illegally boarded and detained a Lithuanian fishing vessel in international waters and impounded the vessel in Russian territory.[40] In both instances, Russia was not held accountable for its violations of international law and was able to force concessions from the Baltic states. Because of the Baltic states' unwillingness to risk open conflict with their most powerful neighbor, and because Russia's permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council prevents it from legally binding sanctions, Russia was able to use these incidents to remind the Baltic states of its supremacy within the region and to demonstrate its ability to violate these states' sovereignty if it chooses to do so.

Another significant concern of the Baltic states is their economic reliance upon Russia, especially considering Russia's use of economic forces as a form of offensive

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[39] United Kingdom Foreign and Commonwealth Office. "Minister Calls for Release of Eston Kohver in Russia," 2015. https://www.gov.uk/government/news/minister-calls-for-release-of-eston-kohver-in-russia

[40] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania. "Lithuanian Foreign Ministry issues diplomatic note to Russian Embassy over incidents in Lithuanian exclusive economic zone," 2014. https://www.urm.lt/default/en/news/lithuanian-foreign-ministry-issues-diplomatic-note-to-russian-embassy-over-incidents-in-lithuanian-exclusive-economic-zone

statecraft. The Baltic states still rely primarily upon Russia for oil and natural gas, which they worry could leave them vulnerable to the forms of economic blackmail suffered by Georgia and Ukraine during their recent conflicts with Russia.[41] While their EU membership has made it possible for the Baltic states to wean themselves off of such dependency upon Russia, this has proven to be an almost unsolvable security dilemma. Russia has demonstrated that taking such actions will have consequences, but if they do not do so, then Russia will continue to maintain a significant capability to disrupt their economies if they stray too far from the desires of the Russian government. This, again, places the Baltic states in the precarious position of determining if it is safest for them to improve their own security within the West or to submit to Russian dominance.

Russian rhetoric has also become less amicable when it comes to the Baltic states. The Russian Foreign Ministry has stated it will "go as far as is needed [to protect] the interests of compatriots" in the Baltics, declared in contravention of its 1991 treaty with Lithuania that when the USSR absorbed the Baltic States it was congruent with international law, and has increasingly accused the Baltic states of breeding "Russophobia" and Nazism (the same claims it made as justification for intervention in Ukraine).[42] Usually such blustery speech would be taken as political posturing, but Putin's Russia has demonstrated a willingness to act upon such statements with force. It has employed economic statecraft, cyber warfare, covert destabilization efforts and even the use of outright military force on the basis of such claims, leading to the political, economic and territorial destabilization of Georgia and Ukraine. Its justification of the

[41] E. Chausovsky. "Russian influence fades in the Baltics." STRATFOR, 2016. https://www.stratfor.com/analysis/russian-influence-fades-baltics

[42] V. Kara-Murza, V. Russia and the Baltics: once friend, now foe. *World Affairs*, January/February, 2015.

right to protect Russians, regardless of the country they reside in, and the demonstrated use of force to do so is why Russia proves to be a credible threat to the Baltic states.

While the Russian state itself could pose an existential threat to the Baltic states, it is the ethnic Russian populations within Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia through which Russia would most likely justify intervention or use to destabilize their states. Unfortunately, the current status of ethnic Russians within the Baltic states could be used by Russia to lend credence to possible military intervention or act as a breeding ground for stoking civil unrest. While it would not be justified, such an intervention could use such a pretext and is an issue which the Baltic states need to address in order to safeguard their own security. This is not, however, an easy problem to solve. As we will see, the issues of identity and security are inextricably linked when it comes to the Russian minority populations within Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, and demonstrate the absolute imperative of social integration, as opposed to marginalization, for both the domestic and international well-being of the Baltic states.

THE ISSUE OF DOMESTIC BALTIC SECURITY

The ethnic Russian populations in the Baltic states have faced an identity crisis since the breakup of the Soviet Union. These populations transitioned from an ethnic majority in the USSR to existing as an ethnic minority in independent states whose existence is now predicated not on ideology but on ethnic identity.[43] Under the USSR, the Baltic states witnessed an influx of ethnic Russians. They never fully integrated, however, into Baltic society. The nature of the Soviet system and its policies in the Baltics created animosity between ethnic Russians and the majority ethnic populations in

[43] A. Kirch, et al. Russians in the Baltic states: to be or not to be? *Journal of Baltic Studies*, (Vol 24, Iss 2, 1993), 180.

the newly independent Baltic states, with many Russians finding themselves in a new state through no fault of their own while the Baltic states held a great deal of animosity towards the Russians who experienced a privileged, urban life prior to the fall of the USSR.[44] Prior to their independence, ethnic Russians held a privileged status within the Baltics, which meant that the dissolution of the USSR immediately left these populations with a sense of trepidation about what place they would occupy within the newly independent states.[45] The majority did not speak the language of the Baltic states as the ethnic Russians tended to occupy relatively isolated, urban enclaves and were able to rely on Russian as the lingua franca of the Soviet Union. Their identity, therefore, remained primarily based upon the ideology of the USSR and their Russian cultural roots.

The Baltic states, upon independence from the Soviet Union, created their national identities based upon their majority ethnic identities, which resulted in establishing a cultural and political cordon sanitaire between ethnic Russians and the majority Baltic populations and governments. The basis of ethnicity for their sovereignty resulted in the development of policies based upon shoring up those identities,[46] such as establishing state language and citizenship based upon ethnic, as opposed to civic, identity. These policy developments, however, led to disenfranchisement by minority populations. For example, Latvian language requirements resulted in separate school systems for Latvian speakers and Russian speakers, creating a segregation of the two ethnic groups which would hold further ramifications when it comes to higher education and employment, so much so that almost a quarter of the Russian speaking population

[44] C. Bildt. The Baltic litmus test. *Foreign Affairs*, (Vol 73, Iss 5, 1994), 78-80.
[45] S. Aptekar. Contexts of exit in the migration of Russian speakers from the Baltic countries to Ireland. *Ethnicities*, (Vol 9, Iss 4, 2009), 509-510.
[46] A. Oldenquist. Ethnicity and sovereignty. *Studies in Eastern European Thought*, (Vol 54, Iss 4, 2002), 279.

believe their human rights are violated by the state's policies.[47] The establishment of state-languages is also particularly disadvantageous to their Russian populations, the majority of whom did not know their new state's titular language.[48]

Overall, language and ethnicity have led to significant educational and economic disparities between ethnic Russians and the state ethnic majorities, as it is more difficult for ethnic Russians to find work in the public sphere and, to a degree, within the private markets of their host states.[49] Such policies also separate the level of self-determination among residents of the Baltic states. Latvia and Estonia determined citizenship based upon ethnicity, as opposed to residency, which created a disparity in rights between them and their Russian minority populations not only in voting but even so far as to create 'stateless' populations within their own borders.[50] The inability of the Russian populations to participate in government beyond the local level significantly reduces their ability or even willingness to integrate or assimilate with the culture of their host nations.

Despite these inequalities, however, ethnic Russians in the Baltics are not overly willing to return to Russia, either through immigration or reabsorption of their host nations by Russia. Most of the Baltic states' Russian populations are not entirely disenfranchised with their new nations. It is important to make the distinction between their civic attachment, which is primarily with their new states, and their cultural

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[47] O. Pisarenko. The acculturation modes of Russian-speaking adolescents in Latvia: perceived discrimination and knowledge of the Latvian language. *Europe-Asia Studies*, (Vol 58, Iss 5, 2006), 757.

[48] T. Heleniak. Migration of the Russian diaspora after the breakup of the Soviet Union. *Journal of International Affairs*, (Vol 57, Iss 2, 2004), 106.

[49] S. Aptekar. Contexts of exit in the migration of Russian speakers from the Baltic countries to Ireland. *Ethnicities*, (Vol 9, Iss 4, 2009), 515.

[50] O. Shevel. The politics of citizenship policy in new states. *Comparative Politics*, (Vol 41, Iss 3, 2009), 278.

attachment, which remains with Russia.[51] Even so, the Russian minorities make up significant portions of these states' overall population, with Estonia and Latvia at approximately 28% and Lithuania at 9%.[52] While certainly not representing the majority of Russians within the Baltic states, there is still a significant number of Russians who are discontented enough to be separatists and advocate for reunification with Russia itself.[53] This does not indicate, however, that there is a significant risk of organic political instability for the Baltic states as a result of their Russian populations. There is a risk, however, of external influencers exacerbating the concerns of the ethnic Russian populations to create such instability.

The primary concern is that it does not require a majority opinion among Baltic Russians to create a situation of unrest which would result in Russian intervention. Vocal proponents of secession or irredentism among Russian and Baltic Russian elites would likely stir up fears among the minority Russian populations and lead to calls for intervention, which have historically been enough to precipitate action.[54] As discussed earlier, Russia also dominates the market of Russian-language news and media even among the Baltic states, which provides it the ability to influence and shape the perceptions of these populations. Combined with its demonstrated capability and willingness to further inflame such issues through the use of covert agents among Russian civilian populations in neighboring states, the result is that the Baltic states face a

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[51] T. Vihalemm & A. Masso. Identity dynamics of Russian-speakers of Estonia in the transition period. *Journal of Baltic Studies*, (Vol 34, Iss 1, 2003) 103.
[52] G. Evans & C. Lipsmeyer. The democratic experience in divided societies: the Baltic states in comparative perspective. *Journal of Baltic Studies*, (Vol 32, Iss 4, 2001), 382.
[53] A. Kirch, et al. Russians in the Baltic states: to be or not to be? *Journal of Baltic Studies*, (Vol 24, Iss 2, 1993), 184.
[54] W. Maley. Does Russia speak for Baltic Russians? *The World Today*, (Vol 51, Iss 1, 1995), 5.

realistic and credible threat that their ethnic minority groups may be manipulated as a tool of Russian foreign policy.

In the past two decades, Russian foreign policy has become increasingly statist/nationalistic in nature. Russian policies do not view Russians as simply its own citizens, but rather "define the Russian nation as a supranational people with a mission to consolidate former peoples of the USSR or Eurasia within a single multinational state".[55] Furthermore, the manipulation of ethnic Russian minorities as a pretense for intervention by the Russian Federation is a tried and tested strategy and is a skill which Russia continues to hone.[56] This use of the Russian diaspora as a pretext to intervention or outright invasion of neighboring countries is the reason why the Baltic states' ethnic Russian populations pose a security concern for their host states.

From the outset, Russian relations with its Baltic neighbors has had an ominous undertone. To retain influence within the FSU, Russia was slow in recalling its military forces stationed within the new Baltic republics, and its disinterest in resettling ethnic Russians left behind made the Baltic states weary of their Russian-speaking population as potential vectors of Russian influence.[57] Pre-dating Putin's more nationalistic rhetoric, President Yeltsin directly pointed to the Baltic states' treatment of their Russian minorities as the reason for delaying the withdrawal of Russian troops from Baltic bases in the early 1990s.[58] Conversely, unequal treatment of Russian populations within the

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[55] K. Malfliet & R. Laenen. *Elusive Russia: Current Developments in Russian State Identity and Institutional Reform under President Putin*, (Leuven University Press, 2007), 39.
[56] S. Starr & S. Cornell. *Putin's Grand Strategy: The Eurasian Union and its Discontents*, (Central-Asia Caucus Institute Silk Road Studies Program, 2014), 60.
[57] S. Simonsen. Compatriot games: explaining the 'diaspora linkage' in Russia's military withdrawal from the Baltic states, *Europe-Asia Studies*, (Vol 53, Iss 5, 2001), 772.
[58] E. Jenne. Nested Security: Lessons in Conflict Management from the League of Nations and the European Union, (Cornell University Press, 2015), 112-113.

Baltic states has left its mark on them, resulting in border disputes between Russia and the Baltic nations as recently as 2005.[59] It is not simply that the Baltic states have Russian populations which puts them at risk of falling prey to Russian foreign policy and intervention, but rather that their policies create an environment where Russian claims for doing so could be, to a degree, demonstrably valid.

The continuing narrative of Russian foreign policy is that it intervenes in its near abroad specifically to protect the lives and rights of the Russian people, and it does not always need to be predicated upon their citizenship. President Putin justified military intervention in Ukraine because, he claimed, the crisis posed a "threat to the lives of Russian citizens."[60] In this way, President Putin used the ethnic Russian population in Ukraine as the absolute reason for Russia's intervention and annexation of Crimea. Additionally, he made it clear that his justification was not entirely based upon the citizenship of those he claimed were in danger, but that it went beyond to extend protection to anyone belonging to the Russian family: "Frankly this is historically Russian territory and Russian people live there…They were in danger, and we cannot abandon them."[61] While the concept of the right to protect is still a controversial topic in the international community, especially because of the ramifications that it has upon the concept of states' sovereignty, the Russian state has taken it even a step further and used the concept to justify incredible actions, to include the annexation of other states' territories into itself. This narrative provides a significant threat to Russia's neighbors, most of whom retain at least some ethnic Russian minorities from the break-up of the

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[59] Y. Bilinsky. Toward the West: Baltic realignment and Russia's reply. *Harvard International Review*, (Vol 28, Iss 1, 2006), 62-63.
[60] M. Kalb. *Imperial Gamble: Putin, Ukraine and the New Cold War*, (Brookings Institution Press, 2015), 159.
[61] Ibid.

Soviet Union, but especially for the Baltic states whose ethnic Russian groups are marginalized and reside within geographic areas of strategic importance to Russia.

The concept of Russia's right to protect Russians with force, regardless of where they might be, is not contained just within the borders of the Russian Federation, either. Indeed, Russian-language media is carefully tailored to push Russia's foreign policy narrative surrounding its actions in its near abroad, to the point that the majority of Russian speakers outside of Russia believe that the US was responsible for the color revolutions, that Georgia initiated the war with Russia in 2008 and that Russia's annexation of Crimea was the right thing to do.[62] By pushing this narrative beyond the borders of Russia to all ethnic Russian populations in its near abroad, Russia is able to set the stage for future interventions. Even if the majority of ethnic Russians in the Baltics are not in favor of separatism, their current standing within society can lend credence to Russia's justification for interfering in the internal politics of the Baltic states or even direct intervention. Additionally, they would likely find a vocal minority within those populations which would support their actions.

Ultimately, the stage is set for the possibility of Russia using force or at least to instigate instability in the Baltic states based upon its popular ideology of Russian nationalism. Russia has demonstrated to the Baltic states its willingness and ability to do so with little to no repercussions from the international community, and even in the face of harsh international backlash it has revealed that Russia is willing to accept such a price in exchange for its reasserted dominance within its near abroad. While the Baltic states

[62] S. Starr & S. Cornell. *Putin's Grand Strategy: The Eurasian Union and its Discontents*, (Central-Asia Caucus Institute Silk Road Studies Program, 2014), 63.

and their Russian minority populations are faced with a complex security/identity dilemma, its resolution is key to their future security and sovereignty.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE BALTIC STATES

The authors Gibler and Sewell have noted that, in the case of post-Soviet states, the involved interests of a regional power (i.e., Russia) have greatly influenced the degree to which these new states have been capable of resolving internal conflicts and adapted mechanics of government to prevent the resurgence of those conflicts, such as free democratic elections, participation in international organizations and alliances as well as adapting and adhering to human rights international law.[63] Essentially, as the risk of Russian direct involvement or possibility of belligerence decreases within a post-Soviet state, it is more likely that the state will transition to less authoritarian-type governance and diplomacy and shift to democratic processes and arbitration to resolve internal conflicts.[64] While NATO and EU expansion into Eastern Europe have decreased the pressure Russia is able to put upon some of these states, its ability to influence ethnic Russian populations provides for the possibility to instigate domestic instability in post-Soviet states.

Russian foreign policy in regard to the diaspora of ethnic Russians in the FSU creates significant security concerns for the Baltic states. Regardless of the impetus, be it resurgent Russian nationalism, exploitation by the Russian government as a tool of realpolitik, irredentism or even cultural bias, the significantly large populations of ethnic Russians in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia pose security risks as vectors of Russian

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[63] D. Gibler & J. Sewell. External threat and democracy: the role of NATO revisited. *Journal of Peace Research*, (Vol 43, Iss 4, 2006) 413-431.
[64] Ibid.

influence. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Baltic states have worked to establish themselves as independent nations, primarily based upon ethnic national identity which has led to varying degrees of disenfranchisement among their Russian minorities. As such, this allows for even the pretense of Russian intervention into the internal affairs of the Baltic states under the guise of its right to protect all Russians, regardless of citizenship. To mitigate this threat, the Baltic states will need to approach the integration of their minority Russian populations as a primary policy concern.

The results of the Baltic states' relationships with their domestic Russian populations have significant impacts for NATO: it is of great concern that Washington wargames Russia's exploitation of the Baltic's large Russian minority population as a vector to challenge NATO's resolve and that such scenarios, more often than not, turn out in Russia's favor.[65] However, while the solutions may appear simple in theory, the problem becomes almost intractable due to the security/identity puzzle posed by the Baltic states' need to safeguard their own sovereignty and legitimacy while also figuring out how to integrate their ethnic Russian populations.[66]

The most effective solution for the Baltic states would be to integrate their ethnic Russian minorities into their national identities.[67] As such, they need to develop policies and reforms to provide true equality for their Russian populations. Furthermore, the Baltic states need to shift from models of cultural assimilation, that is aiming for their Russian minorities to conform more to each state's national identity, and more towards cultural integration, wherein both sides take on aspects of the other to form a more

[65] M. Kalb. *Imperial Gamble: Putin, Ukraine and the New Cold War*, (Brookings Institution Press, 2015), 168-169.
[66] P. Aalto. Revisiting the security/identity puzzle in Russo-Estonian relations. *Journal of Peace Research*, (Vol 40, Iss 5, 2003), 574.
[67] C. Bildt. The Baltic litmus test. *Foreign Affairs*, (Vol 73, Iss 5, 1994), 81.

unified national identity.[68] Assimilation is unlikely to occur because the Russian populations are not isolated and unique to these states, but rather their cultural touchstone of Russia continues to exist in close proximity which reduces the likelihood that they would assimilate and adopt the cultures of their host states. Similarly, they are unlikely to be willing to entirely shed their own culture unless forced to do so. It is much more likely that the populations could integrate, but that would require them to both do so, such as by ending school segregation and instructing both the host-nation language and Russian in their schools.

Current Baltic policies largely segregate and marginalize ethnic Russians, serve only to prevent the integration of these populations and leave them vulnerable to influence by the Russian government and its agents. Full citizenship is an absolute necessity for the integration of Russian minorities into the Baltic states. The Russian use of 'passportization' to increase its legitimacy in intervening on behalf of ethnic Russians in other states is much easier to justify if these populations are left 'stateless.'[69] Additionally, the right to full participation in the civic government under which they live would significantly reduce animosity Baltic Russians may hold for their new states, as citizenship and voting rights are the two leading causes of Russian disenfranchisement within the Baltic states.[70] Integration would be easier, and Russian intervention much more difficult, if the Baltic states take steps to rectify institutional marginalization of their ethnic Russian populations and make them equals within their respective societies.

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[68] D. Laitin. Three models of integration and the Estonian/Russian reality. *Journal of Baltic Studies*, (Vol 34, Iss 2, 2003), 203.
[69] S. Starr & S. Cornell. *Putin's Grand Strategy: The Eurasian Union and its Discontents*, (Central-Asia Caucus Institute Silk Road Studies Program, 2014), 74.
[70] S. Aptekar. Contexts of exit in the migration of Russian speakers from the Baltic countries to Ireland. *Ethnicities*, (Vol 9, Iss 4, 2009), 511.

Unfortunately, the current governments of the Baltic states do not have the political appetite to institute such reforms.

Chapter III: The Status of Ethnic Russians in the Baltics

Since the independence of the Baltic States from Russia, ethnic Russians living within Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia have faced varying degrees of acceptance and integration into the societies of their adopted homelands. Lithuania stands out, as it has largely integrated its ethnic Russian minority to create a multi-ethnic state. In contrast, Latvia and Estonia have continually viewed their ethnic Russian populations negatively and, instead of striving to integrate their minority populations, have endeavored to either force assimilation or expel their ethnic Russian residents.[71]

Russia has demonstrated a continued interest in the Baltic States ever since their independence and has taken threatening actions towards them. It has demonstrated its ability to influence the ethnic Russian populations within those states, especially through its monopoly on Russian-language media. Furthermore, Baltic security anxieties are exacerbated because the majority of their populations do not believe the US would honor its NATO commitments of offering military support in the event of Russian aggression, with Estonia the only state in which the population believes the US would by a paltry 59% in 2017.[72]

Despite ethnic Russians often living as second-class citizens, or even non-citizens, within the Baltic States, their attitudes towards their new homelands have remained generally more positive and favorable than their views about Russia. Even after the Baltic States gained their independence, refused to grant the majority of ethnic Russians citizenship or significant political rights and with the safety-net of Soviet troops

[71] M. Best, The Ethnic Russian Minority: A Problematic Issue in the Baltic States, *Verges: Germanic and Slavic Studies in Review* (Vol 2, Iss 1, 2013), 39.
[72] Pew Research Center, "Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe," 10 May 2017, 133. https://www.pewforum.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2017/05/CEUP-FULL-REPORT.pdf

completely withdrawing from the region in 1994, the ethnic Russians remaining in these new states viewed their governments and the value of residing in the Baltic nations more favorably than those of Russia.[73] This does not mean that they do not hold any affinity for their ethnic homeland of Russia or that they do not take issue with their legal and social status within the Baltic States, because they do, but that the majority are not seeking secession or hoping for Russian irredentism.[74] However, polling shows that, with an average of 77%[75], the majority of ethnic Russians residing within the Baltic States do continue to view Russia favorably and agree that Russia has a responsibility to protect them, and similar numbers report that a strong Russia is necessary to balance the influence of the west[76]. As a result of the actions and rhetoric of the Russian Federation as demonstrated in the previous chapter, the governments and citizens of the Baltic States remain wary of the threat posed by hosting large Russian minorities within their borders, and ethnic Russians living within the Baltic States face a degree of segregation, living in largely hermetic, concentrated populations in urban centers or on the border with Russia.[77]

Since their independence from the Soviet Union, all three of the Baltic States have endeavored to establish themselves as ethno-national states whose identities and citizenry reflect their respective ethnic majorities, to the exclusion of ethnic minorities, which is reflected in their laws and governmental policies. None recognize Russian as an official

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[73] W. Maley. "Does Russia Speak for the Baltic Russians?" *The World Today*, (Vol 51, Iss 1, Jan 1995), 4.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Pew Research Center, "Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe," 10 May 2017, 32. https://www.pewforum.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2017/05/CEUP-FULL-REPORT.pdf
[76] Pew Research Center, "Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe," 10 May 2017, 35-36. https://www.pewforum.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2017/05/CEUP-FULL-REPORT.pdf
[77] A. Kuczynska-Zonik. The Securitization of National Minorities in the Baltic States. *Baltic Journal of Law & Politics*, (Vol 10, Iss 2, 2017), 31.

language and, with the exception of Lithuania, the majority of ethnic Russians are either Russian citizens or stateless.[78] This research has revealed that the security dilemma faced by the Baltic States hinges upon a real and persistent threat from Russia, the legitimate grievances of ethnic Russian populations within the Baltic States with regards to language and citizenship rights, and the insistence of the Estonian and Latvian governments that minorities must be assimilated into Baltic ethno-linguistic traditions while eschewing efforts at social integration. Furthermore, it has revealed that the Baltic States have mixed records of improving social integration of their Russian minorities, but that they are receptive to improving their legal rights and statuses when incentivized to do so in order to participate in international institutions.

Research into the official defense policies, language and citizenship laws, and the attitudes of ethnic Russians residing within the Baltic States reveals a stark difference between the degrees of integration and the nature of the threats posed by ethnic Russians to their states. In Latvia and Lithuania, persistent policies of marginalizing ethnic Russians from public society and attempting to assimilate, rather than integrate, these populations have created a self-affirming security threat. While Latvia and Lithuania pursue these policies out of fear that these populations pose a threat to their states, they are creating legitimate grievances which increase the resentment of these societies and allow Russia greater influence within these populations as it supports their efforts to gain rights. As Russia's influence increases with these populations, Latvia and Lithuania grow increasingly fearful of the possible threat ethnic Russians pose and pursue harsher measures to limit their influence in politics and society. Lithuania, however, has a far

[78] A. Kuczynska-Zonik. The Securitization of National Minorities in the Baltic States. *Baltic Journal of Law & Politics*, (Vol 10, Iss 2, 2017), 30.

different threat system. It has faced far greater success in integrating its ethnic Russian population into the social and political fabric of the state. However, its government has persistently taken a bellicose stance towards Russia, both in policy and rhetoric, which has increased political opposition by its ethnic Russian population who do not hold such views towards their cultural homeland and sometimes feel that Lithuania's fears and criticisms of the Russian state extend to them, allowing Russia to gain a degree of influence and control within the information space of both Lithuania's ethnic Russian and Ethnic Polish minorities.

LATVIA AND ESTONIA: PURSUING ASSIMILATION, NOT INTEGRATION

Latvia and Estonia, upon independence from the Soviet Union, have pursued strict policies of *jus sanguinis* in forming their new states, meaning that ethnic heritage is their primary concern for determining their laws and policies, especially in regard to the rules for citizenship and language. As a result, they have actively suppressed the Russian language, prevented the majority of ethnic Russians from gaining citizenship and marginalized large swaths of their own societies.

In pre-independent Latvia in 1990, the legislature instated "interwar citizenship," which determined citizenship would be granted to those who had resided within the borders of Latvia prior to its occupation by foreign forces and their descendants, which excluded the majority of ethnic Russians living there.[79] This allowed for an almost uniformly ethnic Latvian post-independence legislature to determine the laws governing the legal makeup of the new state, despite more than one third of its population was comprised of ethnic Russians and who today make up approximately one quarter of

[79] O. Shevel. The Politics of Citizenship Policy in New States. *Comparative Politics* (Vol 41, Iss 3, 2009), 278.

Latvia's current population.[80] Currently, the majority of ethnic Russians in Latvia either hold Russian passports or "non-citizen" passports, which means they are resident aliens who do not actually hold citizenship in any state.[81] Additionally, Latvia's current language law, adopted by its parliament in 1999, recognizes Latvian as the sole official language of the state and is the required language for all government and public businesses, as well as all private businesses (to include the self-employed) "if their activities affect the lawful interests of the public (public security, health, morality, health care, protection of consumer rights and employment rights, safety in the work place and public administration supervision) (hereinafter also - lawful interests of the public) and to the extent that the necessary restriction which has been set in the lawful interests of the public is proportional to the rights and interests of private institutions, organisations and undertakings (companies)" and only exempts the undefined term of "unofficial" communications and religious activities. [82]

In Latvia, most politicians are opposed to the promotion or recognition of the Russian language. The laws regarding the use of the Latvian language are enforced by the Latvian State Language Center, which often targets ethnic Russian government workers such as politicians and teachers. For example, in 2016 this organization fined Riga's mayor Nils Usakovs, an ethnic Russian speaker, multiple times for posting in

[80] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia. "Ethnic Composition and the Protection and Promotion of the Cultural Identity of National Minorities," 15 Jan 2015. https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/policy/society-integration/integration-policy-in-latvia-a-multi-faceted-approach/ethnic-structure-and-promotion-of-national-minorities-cultural-identity

[81] Office of Citizenship and Migration Affairs, Latvia. "Latvijas iedzīvotāju sadalījums pēc nacionālā sastāva un valstiskās piederības," (Trans. "Population of by ethnicity and nationality), 2016. https://www.pmlp.gov.lv/lv/assets/documents/statistika/IRD2016/ISVN_Latvija_pec_TTB_VPD.pdf

[82] Parliament of the Republic of Latvia, "Valsts valodas likums," (Trans. "Official Language Law"), Section 2, Articles 2-3, 21 December 1999.

Russian on social media accounts belonging to the Riga city government.[83] In 2012, a referendum for a constitutional amendment to include Russian as an official state language was overwhelmingly rejected, in large part because most ethnic Russians in Latvia do not have citizenship and cannot vote, and its defeat was lauded by both the Latvian President and Prime Minister who claimed its passage would have endangered the Latvian Constitution and emphasized instead the need for ethnic Russians to learn Latvian.[84] As late as 2018, Latvian President Raimonas Vejonis signed amendments to the state's laws governing education specifically intended to end all Russian-language schooling, both public and private, and across all levels of instruction from kindergartens to universities, by 2021.[85] The coordinated and systemic suppression of the Russian language is the result of Latvia's insistence that its minority groups not be integrated, but assimilated into Latvian society both as a result of its desire to form an ethno-national state and out of fear of Russian influence through ethnic Russians in the state. This is further borne out in its defense policies.

After Latvia joined the European Union and NATO it began to regularly publish its defense strategy, known as National Security Concepts, which highlight the state's national defense objectives, threats and policy responses as developed by its Ministry of Defence and ratified by the parliament. The first two National Security Concepts, published in 2005 and 2008, primarily focused upon security objectives of integration

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[83] *Meduza*, "Riga mayor is fined for using Russian on social media," 27 July 2016. https://meduza.io/en/news/2016/07/27/latvian-mayor-is-fined-for-using-russian-on-social-media

[84] D. Herszenhorn, "Latvians Reject Russian as Second Language," *The New York Times*, 19 February 2012. https://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/20/world/europe/latvia-rejects-bid-to-adopt-russian-as-second-language.html?_r=0

[85] Novaya Gazeta. "Президент Латвии утвердил перевод русских школ на латышский язык," (Trans. "Latvian President Transition of Russian Schools into Latvian") 2 April 2018. https://www.novayagazeta.ru/news/2018/04/02/140670-prezident-latvii-utverdil-perevod-russkih-shkol-na-latyshskiy-yazyk

into the European Union and NATO[8687], while dismissing that the Latvian state faced significant external threats.[8889] In regards to internal security, both documents identify the need to pursue a higher level of integration of Latvia's ethnic minorities and non-citizens. However, their policy prescriptions are focused on ensuring these population groups are assimilated into the Latvian ethno-linguistic identity. The 2005 National Security Concept identifies the lack of Latvian language proficiency as the key hindrance to ethnic minorities integrating into society, and also prescribes that naturalization of new citizens, while needed, must be addressed "in the context of the Latvian ethno policy."[90] Likewise, the 2008 National Security Concept highlights the need for increased social integration, to include using public education to emphasize Latvian history and language and as an avenue to encourage loyalty to the state.[91] Furthermore, it continues the emphasis on the Latvian language from the previous National Security Concept as a way to unify public opinion, stating "The consistent consolidation of the Latvian language in all areas of public life and encouraging its use among the population is an important factor in reducing isolation of information spaces."[92] Later iterations of Latvia's National Security Concept would become much more detailed in their analysis of threats and proposed solutions, but the theme of recognizing a split between ethnic Latvians and

[86] Latvian Ministry of Defence. "National Security Concept of the Republic of Latvia (2005)," 1. https://www.mod.gov.lv/sites/mod/files/document/2005_nd_en.pdf
[87] Latvian Ministry of Defence. "National Security Concept of the Republic of Latvia (2008)," 3-4. https://www.mod.gov.lv/sites/mod/files/document/2008_nd_en.pdf
[88] Latvian Ministry of Defence. "National Security Concept of the Republic of Latvia (2005)," 3. https://www.mod.gov.lv/sites/mod/files/document/2005_nd_en.pdf
[89] Latvian Ministry of Defence. "National Security Concept of the Republic of Latvia (2008)," 5-6. https://www.mod.gov.lv/sites/mod/files/document/2008_nd_en.pdf
[90] Latvian Ministry of Defence. "National Security Concept of the Republic of Latvia (2005)," 3. https://www.mod.gov.lv/sites/mod/files/document/2005_nd_en.pdf
[91] [91] Latvian Ministry of Defence. "National Security Concept of the Republic of Latvia (2008)," 11. https://www.mod.gov.lv/sites/mod/files/document/2008_nd_en.pdf
[92] Ibid.

ethnic minorities while prescribing the use of the Latvian language as its solution will remain consistent.

Latvia's 2011 National Security Concept identified the lack of social and linguistic integration of its minorities as a significant security threat, as it could lead to splitting of the society and resulting in two different "information spaces" in which not all of society is integrated into values of state loyalty or pro-Latvian/EU ideals.[93] To counter this issue, it proposes to limit foreign aid to NGOs which support minority interests and become itself the primary source of support for such agencies, to increase efforts at indoctrinating patriotic and pro-Latvian values in school children, and to increase resources to shift consumption of media by ethnic majorities to Latvian-language sources.[94] Finally, this document proposes that, beginning in the 1st grade, schools will begin instructing school children to gain knowledge of European Union languages to facilitate ties to Europe[95], which excludes the Russian language as it is not an official language in this international institution. This document, while never specifically speaking directly about the Russian minority, specifically targets Latvia's problem of integrating them into society. Despite using the term "integration," these policies reflect Latvia's persistent efforts to have the ethnic Russian minority assimilate. If the Latvian state limited foreign aid to NGOs which support ethnic Russians' interests and became the primary source of such support, it would be able to significantly limit those which it finds threatening to its assimilation endeavors. The efforts of this National Security Concept do not address the primary grievances of ethnic Russians as the reasons

[93] Latvian Ministry of Defence. "National Security Concept of the Republic of Latvia (2011)," 5-6. https://www.mod.gov.lv/sites/mod/files/document/2011_EN_ND.pdf
[94] Ibid., 6-7.
[95] Ibid., 7.

for which they pose a threat to the Latvian state, but rather external (i.e., Russian) sources of media and funds.

Latvia's most recent National Security Concept published in 2016 states that the promotion of the status of the Russian language sews disunity within its society[96] and poses their internal solution as focusing on a national language policy in which instruction of the Latvian language takes precedence for both ethnic Latvian citizens and Latvia's minority groups alike.[97] In this Security Concept, the Latvian parliament acknowledges that public media consumption must be considered an aspect of national security and recognizes that its Russian minority strongly prefers to consume media in the Russian language, which mostly comes from the Russian Federation and promotes pro-Russian ideals and degrades the value Western institutions such as NATO and the European Union. However, the strategy it proposes to address this issue emphasizes that Latvia continues to pursue a policy of assimilation, rather than integration, of its ethnic Russian population. The 2016 National Security Concept advocates to establish a regulatory framework which would allow Latvia to block access to foreign-based media sources which "disseminate information that juxtaposes the interests of the Republic of Latvia within the territory of Latvia" and to replace them by providing more access to commercial and cable television from Western Europe. [98] This plan, and the previous Latvian security documents evaluated in this research, demonstrates the continued unwillingness of the Latvian state to deviate from its policy of assimilating its ethnic Russian minority. Furthermore, because of its dedication to refrain from taking any

[96] Latvian Ministry of Defence. "National Security Concept of the Republic of Latvia (2016-)," 15. https://www.mod.gov.lv/sites/mod/files/document/NDK_ENG_final.pdf
[97] Ibid., 16-20.
[98] Ibid., 19.

actions which would appear to legitimize the use of the Russian language in society, Latvia continues to be disadvantaged in its ability to counter Russian disinformation campaigns which specifically target the Russian-speaking audience within its own borders as it pursues policies which avidly avoid engaging them in their own language.

In lockstep with Latvia, Estonia similarly altered its citizenship laws pre-independence in 1989 based on interwar residence/heritage, to the exclusion of its ethnic Russians who made up and continue to be approximately one third of the nation's population, which resulted in a uniformly ethnic Estonian legislature in post-independence Estonia determining the laws of the new state.[99] Estonia's suppression of the Russian language has long-term negative effects upon its ethnic Russian population. For example, with Estonian as the only official language of the state, ethnic Russians are uniquely disadvantaged in the educational system. There is only one university in Estonia which instructs in the Russian language, a privately funded institution in Tallinn, and only 13% of the Russian-speaking population attends university in the country.[100]

In 1995, the European Union insisted that Estonia would have to improve its citizenship policies to reduce the number of its "stateless" persons as a precondition to membership, and after 9 years the Estonian government became a member by altering its naturalization laws to allow for legal residents to become citizens after living in the country for 5 years, but with additional requirements such as language and history proficiencies which hinder ethnic Russians from attaining citizenship.[101] Currently, of

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[99] O. Shevel. The Politics of Citizenship Policy in New States. *Comparative Politics* (Vol 41, Iss 3, 2009), 278.
[100] V. Sotirovic. The Russian Minority Question in Estonia. *Oriental Review*, 5. https://orientalreview.org/2018/11/26/the-russian-minority-question-in-estonia-i/
[101] V. Sotirovic. The Russian Minority Question in Estonia. *Oriental Review*, 2. https://orientalreview.org/2018/11/26/the-russian-minority-question-in-estonia-i/

the ethnic Russians living in Estonia, approximately one third hold citizenship in Estonia, once third hold Russian passports, and one third hold resident alien, or "gray," passports which grants them "special legal status" but not citizenship of any state, thereby skirting the EU's requirements to reduce its numbers of "stateless" peoples.[102]

Estonia consistently pursues language policies aimed at promoting the use of the Estonian language and to prevent the use of the Russian language. In 1997, the Estonian government voted to restrict high school education taught in languages other than Estonian, requiring 60 percent of studies to be taught in Estonian and 40 percent in another language, and the Estonian government is also able to prevent schools from choosing Russian as the minority language of instruction as educational institutions' choice is subject to approval by the government.[103] The Estonian Language Inspectorate, a government office, enforces the use and proficiency of the Estonian language for all government employees, from clerks and bus drivers to political offices and teachers, and can fine or terminate employees for not maintaining an adequate mastery of the language, including teachers who instruct in Russian-language schools.[104] In 2007, with tensions already high due to the controversial moving of a Soviet-era statue in Estonia, Russian language media began to vocally condemn the Inspectorate for its penchant of firing ethnic Russian teachers after failing surprise spot checks.[105]

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[102] A. Whyte, "The 'grey passport' issue: Ministry of the Interior's response," *Estonian Public Broadcasting*, 7 August 2018. https://news.err.ee/852030/the-grey-passport-issue-ministry-of-the-interior-s-response

[103] S. Vedler. "Divide and conquer in Estonia," *The Baltic Times*, 21 February 2012. https://baltictimes.com/article/jcms/id/12983/

[104] C. Levy. "Estonia Raises Its Pencils to Erase Russian." *The New York Times*, 7 June 2010. https://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/08/world/europe/08estonia.html

[105] J. Ioffe, "Ethnic Russians in the Baltics Are Actually Persecuted. So Why Isn't Putin Stepping In?" *The New Republic*, 11 March 2014. https://newrepublic.com/article/116970/estonia-lithuania-mistreat-ethnic-russians-nato-keeps-putin-out

The Estonian Language Inspectorate has become a significant point of contention for ethnic Russians in Estonia, and one which Russian media is quick to highlight as a significant aspect of institutional discrimination against ethnic Russians, such as in 2011 when the Inspectorate fired five orphanage workers in the city of Narva for not speaking proficient enough Estonian, despite the fact that 97% of the population of Narva speaks Russian.[106] Furthermore, resentment and angry protests by ethnic Russians significantly increased in 2016 when Estonia shuttered its remaining Russian-language newspapers.[107] The Russian language, except in strictly private communication, is systematically and systemically suppressed within the state of Estonia.

Additionally, non-citizens residing in Estonia, the majority of which are ethnic Russians, are politically marginalized. While they may vote in local elections, they face legal restrictions from voting in national elections or attaining political offices, organizing political parties at the national level, and non-citizens face heavy restrictions from serving in civil services, the military, or police.[108] As a result, Russia gained political capital to criticize the Estonian state for its treatment of Russian and increased its popularity and influence with Estonia's ethnic Russians. In 2007, the Estonian government chose to move a Soviet-era statue of a soldier to a more secluded area, which resulted in violent protests from ethnic Russians residing in the nation and three weeks of concerted cyber-attacks from Russia on the infrastructure of the state.[109] Additionally,

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[106] Russia Today, "Language inquisition: Estonia gets tough on Russian speakers," 1 December 2011. https://www.rt.com/news/estonia-russian-language-ban-635/

[107] *Lenta*, "В Эстонии закрыли последние русскоязычные газеты," (Trans. "In Estonia, the last Russian-language newspapers are closed"), 29 September 2016. https://lenta.ru/news/2016/09/29/ruspress/

[108] V. Sotirovic. The Russian Minority Question in Estonia. *Oriental Review*, 4. https://orientalreview.org/2018/11/26/the-russian-minority-question-in-estonia-i/

[109] A. Scrutton & D. Mardiste. "Wary of divided loyalties, a Baltic state reaches out to its Russians." *Reuters*, 24 Feb 2017. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-baltics-russia/wary-of-divided-loyalties-a-baltic-state-reaches-out-to-its-russians-idUSKBN1630W2

research conducted by academics and American news agencies in 2015 revealed "the divide between ethnic Russians and ethnic Estonians was more keenly felt in the aftermath of the Ukraine conflict than before" and "data reflects generally more critical views of the Estonian government, of NATO, and of the United States on the part of the Russian minority population," and that these feelings coincided with a general upswell in criticism by ethnic Russians of Estonia's policies towards Russian language schools and "stateless" Russians who did not hold Russian citizenship but were not Estonian citizens because they could not pass the language tests.[110]

Estonia's history of anti-Russian policies is also reflected in its national security policies, which regularly emphasize the need for society to be cohesive through the assimilation of its ethnic minorities, especially through the uniform promotion of the Estonian language and Western values. In its initial National Security Concept, Estonia viewed its security situation as predominantly concerning terrorism and crime, with and viewed the possibility of military conflicts as almost non-existent, stating:

> "The probability of a military conflict breaking out, that would encompass all of Europe, or the threat of a conflict in the Baltic Sea region has been reduced to a minimum. Membership in NATO and the EU reduces the threat of war for Estonia even more. Estonia's national security is neither presently, nor will be in the near future, confronted with a direct military threat."[111]

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[110] M. Rojansky. "U.S. Policy Toward the Baltic States," Prepared Testimony for U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia and Emerging Threats, U.S. House of Representatives, 22 Mar 2017, 7.

[111] Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Estonia, "National Security Concept of the Republic of Estonia (2004)," 6. https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/156841/Estonia-2004.pdf

This Concept further notes that a top priority for Estonia's internal security is the consolidation of the rule of law and integration of society. As such, it places paramount importance upon its Integration Policy aimed at unifying its society into a singular entity based upon two principles: knowledge of the Estonian language and the acquisition of Estonian citizenship.[112] It is notable that even in its earliest public National Security Concept, Estonia views its domestic security as based on assimilation, rather than integration, of its ethnic minorities which include a third of its population, the majority of whom do not hold Estonian citizenship or fluency in the Estonian language.

In its 2010 National Security Concept, Estonia elaborates on the threat that its largely un-integrated minorities pose to its internal stability. It re-states that its integration processes are vital to maintaining Estonia's security, and highlights "poorly adapting social groups" as a threat.[113] This National Security Concept also emphasizes its prescriptions to integrate its ethnic minorities by shaping them into Estonian society based upon Estonian values and identity through stronger enforcement of its language policies and education, and to gain stronger support for its Integration Policy from local governments, state authorities and civil society organizations.[114]

Finally, in its 2017 National Security Concept, Estonia recognizes Russia as its most significant security threat as a result of its desired influence in the Baltics, its aggressive activities in Ukraine, and repeated aggressive and provocative activities directed at Estonia.[115] In acknowledging the risk posed by Russian information

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[112] Ibid., 16.

[113] Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Estonia, "National Security Concept of the Republic of Estonia (2010)," 8. https://www.eda.europa.eu/docs/default-source/documents/estonia---national-security-concept-of-estonia-2010.pdf

[114] Ibid., 21-22.

[115] Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Estonia, "National Security Concept of the Republic of Estonia (2017)," 4.

operations, this National Security Concept dedicates an entire chapter to societal cohesion, specifically prescribing the need for all segments of its population to better understand the Estonian language and using strategic messaging to counter "excessively divergent views and unbalanced criticism."[116] The intent of such policies are to better unify the whole of Estonian society into its ethno-national values and provide for "psychological defence" from opposing narratives which criticize or otherwise undermine Estonian institutions and legitimacy.[117]

Ultimately, both Estonia and Latvia face a significant security problem regarding their large, ethnic Russian minorities. Through *jus sanguinis* policies of citizenship and language laws, ethnic Russians have been significantly marginalized from society. The legitimate threat of provocations from Russia has only exacerbated the anxieties held by the governments of Latvia and Estonia, leading them to take harsher measures to prevent ethnic Russians from gaining influence in society unless they become assimilated into the ethno-national culture. These measures, however, simply increase the risk that Russia will gain influence and popularity with these populations and use them as a vector to destabilize these NATO member states.

LITHUANIA: MAINTAINING A WELL-INTEGRATED BUT 'OTHER' RUSSIAN MINORITY

Unlike Latvia or Estonia, Lithuania has made successful efforts to integrate its ethnic Russian minority into society. Lithuania retained its universal citizenship laws established in 1989, which lacked any ethnic requirements, when it held its first post-independence elections in 1990, but its subsequent legislature was composed almost

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http://www.kaitseministeerium.ee/sites/default/files/elfinder/article_files/national_security_concept_2017.pdf

[116] Ibid., 19-20.

[117] Ibid., 20.

entirely of Lithuanians who altered the citizenship laws in 1991 to grant preferential treatment to those "of Lithuanian descent."[118] This is not surprising given that, at the time of independence to the present day, Lithuania maintained and maintains the smallest percentage of ethnic Russians among the Baltic States, vacillating between 5-10% of the national population.[119] The majority of ethnic Russians in Lithuania do have citizenship as Lithuania implemented a *jus soli* principle, that is anyone born within the country gets citizenship, in stark contrast to the *jus sanguinis*, or "right of blood," principles used by Latvia and Estonia.[120] In fact, Lithuania has been the most successful of the Baltic States in integrating its ethnic Russian minority. The ethnic Russians in Lithuania are free to attend schools in the Russian language at all levels of education, they have little trouble gaining citizenship, and even their self-reporting of ever experiencing discrimination based on their minority status as polled in 2008 is quite low at 12%, as opposed to the Latvia and Estonia where reporting revealed 25% and 55% respectively.[121]

One reason why ethnic Russians in Lithuania do not pose a significant security threat to their state is because the state does not treat them as a threat. This is in part due to the relatively small percentage of the population made up of ethnic Russians in comparison to the other Baltic States, leading Lithuanians to not view them as influential or threatening.[122] Since its independence from the Soviet Union, Russians have been

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[118] O. Shevel. The Politics of Citizenship Policy in New States. *Comparative Politics* (Vol 41, Iss 3, 2009), 278.
[119] A. Butkus. "Lietuvos gyventojai tautybės požiūriu" (Trans. "Lithuanian residents in terms of nationality"), *Alkas*, 16 Dec 2015. http://alkas.lt/2015/12/16/a-butkus-lietuvos-gyventojai-tautybes-poziuriu/
[120] M. Best, The Ethnic Russian Minority: A Problematic Issue in the Baltic States, *Verges: Germanic and Slavic Studies in Review* (Vol 2, Iss 1, 2013), 35.
[121] Ibid., 38.
[122] A. Vilenski, "Baltics: Lithuania has been more tolerant to its Russian population," *Baltic Review*, 23 November 2017. https://baltic-review.com/baltics-lithuania-tolerant-russian-population/

consistently treated by the government as equal citizens, despite Lithuanian serving as the sole official language of the state the language laws since 1995 made significant concessions to ethnic minorities allowing them to preserve their language and culture, and the resulting integration of its Russian citizens fostered strong bonds to the state which significantly hampers Russian information operations' effectiveness in sewing dissent.

In 1995 the Lithuanian Seimas (the Lithuanian parliament) passed "The Law on the State Language", which determined when, where and how to enforce the use of Lithuanian as the sole official language and also established the State Lithuanian Language Commission to further clarify rules and act as an enforcement mechanism for the state[123] which, despite adhering to the principle desires of the Lithuanians to ensure the existence of their state based on an ethno-national model, makes significant concessions to ethnic minority groups so that they might retain their languages while still integrating into the greater Lithuanian society as a whole. The concluding sentence in Article 1 of this law states, "Other laws of the Republic of Lithuania and legal acts adopted by the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania shall guarantee the right of persons, belonging to ethnic communities, to foster their language, culture and customs."[124] While there are many similarities to the language laws of Estonia and Latvia, such as requiring Lithuanian to be the language of instruction in education and delineates proficiencies required for all state employees, it also guarantees instruction to learn

[123] Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, "Republic of Lithuania Law on the State Language," 31 January 1995.
[124] Ibid., Section I, Article 1.

Lithuanian and specifically exempts "teaching and special programs and events…intended for ethnic communities."[125]

Despite the deep integration of ethnic Russians into Lithuanian society, the government does still view them as a potential threat because of Russia's influence. Following the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaite stated that Russia was a "terrorist state," alarming ethnic Russians,[126] and that she would attempt to significantly limit Russian television broadcasts in Lithuania,[127] despite the country not having any domestic Russian-language television media. She followed through severe restrictions and cutting off access to Russian-language television and radio for periods of time, although at the risk of raising complaints regarding freedom of speech rights by Lithuania's ethnic Russians.[128] As concerns mount regarding Russia's actions, the ethnic Russians in Lithuania are increasingly viewed with suspicion. In 2015 Waldemar Tomaszewski, the leader of Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania which serves as the political party for Polish minority in Lithuania, began to court ethnic Russians for support which led to an increase in Lithuanian suspicions of ethnic Poles because of their association with the ethnic Russian minority.[129] In the same year, the fact that Lithuania's ethnic Russians still hold strong cultural ties to Russia became clear when the government of Vilnius decided to remove four Soviet-era statues in the city, drawing harsh criticism from the Russian minority and eliciting condemnation

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[125] Ibid., Section VI, Article 13.
[126] R. Thornton & M. Karagiannis, "The Russian Threat to the Baltic States: The Problems of Shaping Local Defense Mechanisms," Journal of Slavic Military Studies (Vol 29, Iss 3, 2016), 346.
[127] STRATFOR, "Baltic States Concerned about Large Russian Minority," 16 October 2014. https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/baltic-states-concerned-about-large-russian-minority
[128] R. Thornton & M. Karagiannis, "The Russian Threat to the Baltic States: The Problems of Shaping Local Defense Mechanisms," Journal of Slavic Military Studies (Vol 29, Iss 3, 2016), 346.
[129] *The Economist*, "Stirring the Pot," 3 March 2015. https://www.economist.com/europe/2015/03/03/stirring-the-pot

from Larisa Dmitriyeva, who was a member of the Lithuanian parliament and one of the leaders of the ethnicity-based political party Lithuanian Union of Russians.[130]

In Lithuania's 2006 Annual Strategic Review, the government identifies Lithuanian "strategic culture" as one in which, since its independence from the Soviet Union, "the Lithuanian perception of 'we' clearly encompassed Western civilization and values, while Eastern neighbors were perceived as 'they.'"[131] This concept is borne out in successive Lithuanian security policies, which consistently use the threat of Russian aggression as a way to unify domestic policy and identity, even though it raises ire among its ethnic Russian population who still have strong ties to their cultural homeland and can feel that they are included in the state's anti-Russian rhetoric. As the 2006 Annual Strategic Review states:

> "At the very beginning of the process of nation-state building, Lithuania like many other newly emerged or transition countries, employed the model of the so called "conflict ethnic conduct," which consisted of utilizing the image of the outside enemy for domestic consolidation and attracting political attention and economic assistance of the countries of a "democratic core." It is not surprising, that it is the former metropolis which was selected for this role. As far as the Lithuanian statehood was strengthening, this mobilizing mechanism was gradually losing its

[130] S. Cerniauskas, "Russian-speaking Lithuanians upset at plans to remove Soviet-era monuments," *The Guardian*, 16 July 2015. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jul/16/russian-speaking-lithuanians-upset-plans-remove-soviet-era-monuments

[131] Lithuanian Military Academy, "Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review 2006," Strategic Research Center, 195. https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/120627/Lithuanian_Annual_Strategic_Review_2006.pdf

> importance. But even now Russia continues to stay a significant "other" or a negative point of reference."[132]

This viewpoint of Russia as the "other" persists in both Lithuanian state rhetoric and policy, and to a degree marginalizes ethnic Russians who do not hold this same viewpoint and can feel that such criticism of Russia likewise applies to them.

The Lithuanian 2012 National Security Strategy, while not explicitly naming Russia, recognizes internal social discord as a potential threat to national security, and its policy prescriptions to prevent such discord is to cultivate "civic awareness and patriotism."[133] To do so, this strategy policy directs that Lithuania will make civic awareness and patriotism compulsory aspects of the education system[134] and to promote the use of the Lithuanian language while implementing public information policy measures aimed at preventing the negative effects of information "directed against the State and its citizens."[135] While this policy document not specifically name Russia, its prescriptions make clear that concerns regarding internal security are based upon the heterogenous cultural makeup of its society. After the Russian annexation of Crimea, however, the Lithuanian National Security Strategy would drastically change, raising the alarm of Russia's aggression and the threat posed by its ethnic Russian minority.

In its 2017 National Security Strategy, the Russian Federation is identified as the paramount security threat to the Lithuanian state.[136] Recognizing the threat posed by

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[132] Ibid., 81.

[133] Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, "Resolution Amending the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania Resolution on the Approval of the National Security Strategy," 2012, 14. https://www.bbn.gov.pl/ftp/dok/07/LTU_National_Security_Strategy_2012.pdf

[134] Ibid.

[135] Ibid., 15.

[136] Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, "Resolution Amending the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania Resolution on the Approval of the National Security Strategy," 2017, 2.

Russian information operations, this security strategy highlights the need for Lithuania to pursue legal avenues to prevent the dissemination of information it deems poses a threat to its "sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence,"[137] and to make an effort to bring ethnic Russians more in line with the political values of the Lithuanian state, as it implies the regions which are predominantly composed of ethnic Russians are areas in which "active citizenship is weaker."[138] This view of ethnic Russians residing, to a degree, within a separate space from the majority of Lithuanians and being susceptible to Russian information operations was made explicit in the previous year's National Threat Assessment.

The Lithuanian 2016 National Threat Assessment identified the Russian-language education systems and communities as a significant vector for Russian influence operations.[139] In particular, it describes ethnic Russian communities and schools as a "closed" network in which Russia, through its embassy in Vilnius and several Russian-funded NGOs is able to promote Russia's interests in the community, foster Russian compatriot sentiments and anti-Western notions, and that such activities bleed over into Lithuania's Polish minority population in which "a substantial proportion of this community lives in the Russian cultural and information field, which constantly incites anti-Lithuanian hostility and mistrust of the ethnic communities through disinformation and propaganda."[140] To a degree, this notion of ethnic Russians as living apart from the greater Lithuanian community has given rise to some inter-ethnic anxieties. Polling in

[137] Ibid., 13.
[138] Ibid., 14.
[139] State Security Department of the Republic of Lithuania. "National Threat Assessment 2016," 46. https://www.vsd.lt/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/EN-2015-gresmes.pdf
[140] Ibid.

2017 indicates that more than two thirds of Lithuanians believe that their society would be better if it was homogenous in religion, culture and ethnicity.[141]

Finally, in its 2019 National Threat Assessment, Lithuania again acknowledges that Russia actively engages in disinformation and propaganda efforts, especially through social media, to foment discontent among the Lithuanian population, with a particular emphasis upon alleged violations of the rights of Russian-speakers and by exacerbating inter-ethnic tensions.[142] Despite how well Lithuania has integrated its ethnic Russian minority, there remains a degree of inter-ethnic tensions within its society. Russians continue to hold pro-Russian cultural attachments and sentiments, which increases their sense of societal marginalization when the Lithuanian state engages in anti-Russian rhetoric or pursues anti-Russian policies. Furthermore, while Latvian Russians are exceedingly unlikely to actively work against the interests of their state and are actively engaged in all levels of its political processes, the lack of the Latvian state's engagement with this group in the Russian language leaves them especially vulnerable to Russian influence.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM RESEARCH

Despite the comparatively high standard of living in the Baltic States, their ethnic Russian minorities have legitimate grievances which can be leveraged by the Russian Federation to threaten their security. The defense policies of the Baltic States focus on Russia as their greatest security threat, which bleeds over into social perceptions of the

[141] Pew Research Center, "Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe," 10 May 2017, 154. https://www.pewforum.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2017/05/CEUP-FULL-REPORT.pdf

[142] State Security Department of the Republic of Lithuania. "National Threat Assessment 2019," 39-40. https://www.vsd.lt/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/2019-Gresmes-internetui-EN.pdf

unintegrated Russian minorities. This is exacerbated by historical grievances of the ethnic Baltic groups towards Russia.

Historically, the Baltic States have improved the status and rights of ethnic Russians minorities when required to do so in exchange for membership to highly beneficial international institutions, such as the European Union. As noted in this chapter, all of the Baltic States made improvements to their citizenship laws when the European Union made it a requirement for membership. However, the European Union's efforts at the time were to remedy the risk of "stateless" residents and thus focused on persuading the Baltic States to move away from their models based on interwar residence and descent, which they did, but did not raise qualms about Baltic policies which heavily favored citizenship based on ethnicity.[143]

Additionally, the security situation is markedly different for Lithuania than it is for Latvia and Estonia. While Lithuania's ethnic Russians are deeply integrated at most levels of society, its bellicose rhetoric and policies risk raising the ire of its ethnic Russian minority which retains strong cultural ties to the Russian Federation. Estonia and Latvia, however, seem to be trapped in a downward spiraling relationship with their ethnic Russian minorities, who are largely marginalized from society, especially susceptible to Russian influence as a result, and the increasing threat posed by Russia both from its actions and its increasing influence only encourages Estonia and Latvia to more strictly treat its Russian residents in a vicious cycle.

[143] O. Shevel. The Politics of Citizenship Policy in New States. *Comparative Politics* (Vol 41, Iss 3, 2009), 285.

According to Matthew Rojansky, the Director of the Kennan Institute at the Wilson Center, in testimony to the US House of Representatives' Committee on Foreign Affairs in 2017:

> "A crisis is still very possible in any one of the Baltic States. The sensitive disputes over local language tests for full citizenship, and Russian language in schools, the press, and even social media could escalate relatively quickly and easily in case of a triggering event. Such an event, whether real or staged, could involve an alleged hate crime against Russian speakers, closure of a private Russian language organization or publication, or even allegations of election fraud."[144]

In this context, what is the US able to do from a policy perspective to prevent such a crisis from ever manifesting within its Baltic allies?

[144] M. Rojansky. "U.S. Policy Toward the Baltic States," Prepared Testimony for U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia and Emerging Threats, U.S. House of Representatives, 22 Mar 2017, 8.

Chapter IV: Conclusion and Policy Options for the United States

The United States has limited policy options to resolve the threat posed by Russia's ability to the domestic Russian populations of the Baltic States. The majority of actions taken by the United States and NATO to address Baltic security concerns have been intended to provide reassurance and deterrence but fall short of prevention, especially in the context of Russia's ability to exploit ethnic population as a vector to destabilize neighboring states.[145] However, the United States is uniquely capable to assist in these security needs by improving Baltic civic integration and security through its influence in international institutions, grassroots diplomacy, and information operations. First, the United States can use its significant influence in Western institutions, such as NATO, to incentivize the Baltic States to adopt policies which both directly and indirectly improve the civic rights of ethnic Russians and improve their integration with the ethnic Baltic populations such as by encouraging these states to adopt the Israeli model of universal conscription. Second, while the domestic nature of the security issues posed by ethnic Russian in the Baltics precludes the effective use of direct diplomatic means, the US State Department could use grassroots efforts to encourage societal integration at a young age by promoting and funding the growth of English-language secondary schools fostering both the use of English as a neutral language and inter-ethnic personal relationships in formative age-groups. Finally, the US could revive US State Department information operations programs to counter Russian disinformation, such as increasing Russian-language media in the Baltic States to provide sources of news and entertainment to ethnic Russians.

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[145] Andres Kasekamp, "Are the Baltic States Next?" in *Strategic Challenges in the Baltic Sea Region: Russia, Deterrence, and Reassurance*, edited by Sophie Dahl (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2018), 70.

INCENTIVIZATION THROUGH INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

The US maintains significant influence within and through international institutions and alliances to indirectly incentivize the Baltic States to take actions which would both improve their security, deter possible Russian aggression, provide reassurance, and significantly remedy both the perceptions and realities of the threat posed by ethnic Russians within the Baltic States. The US should encourage Estonia and Latvia to pursue the conscription model of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), which serves as a tool of integration for society. Additionally, the United States should spend diplomatic capital to persuade the European Union (EU) to increase its standards for member states to recognize significant ethnic languages as official languages and to reduce the numbers of stateless residents through more relaxed naturalization processes.

Enacting universal conscription based on the Israeli model would simultaneously improve societal integration and reduce the risk posed by Russia to the Baltic States but runs counter to the current trends of NATO states. Since the end of the Cold War, both the EU and NATO have been steadily phasing out the use of conscription in favor of professional military forces, and both Latvia and Lithuania abandoned conscription in 2008 in order to model themselves on NATO's preferred expeditionary model for armed forces[146]. Only 5 of the 28 NATO member states continue to use conscription as well as only 6 of the 27 EU states[147], although Sweden has reinstituted conscription in direct reaction to Russian aggression in Ukraine and the Baltics.[148] Furthermore, while both Estonia and Lithuania currently mandate conscription, Estonia will only conscript

[146] R. Thornton & M. Karagiannis, "The Russian Threat to the Baltic States: The Problems of Shaping Local Defense Mechanisms," Journal of Slavic Military Studies (Vol 29, Iss 3, 2016), 347.
[147] Bernd Riegert, "EU nations continue to phase out military conscription," Deutsche Welle, 1 July 2010. https://www.dw.com/en/eu-nations-continue-to-phase-out-military-conscription/a-5749541
[148] BBC News, "Sweden brings back military conscription amid Baltic tensions," BBC, 2 March 2017. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-39140100

Russians who are citizens and its mandatory service is easy to avoid, with only approximately one third of eligible men actually passing through their conscription service.[149] However, transitioning to conscription services based on the Israeli model would serve multiple benefits to Estonia and Latvia, including increased integration of their ethnic Russian populations into society and providing the Baltic States with a stronger deterrence posture by vastly increasing the number of trained, inactive reserve forces which can be called to service in times of crisis. Estonia even officially recognizes that conscription serves to better integrate ethnic Russians into society,[150] although under its current practices this does not occur.

The Israeli model of conscription would be a viable measure to not only improve the security standing of the Baltic States, but to better integrate the ethnic Russians into Baltic societies. Arab Druze lobbied the Israeli government to be included in the military draft in order to better gain acceptance and integration in Israeli society and the government, in turn, acquiesced while resolving its own security concerns with incorporating non-Jews by designating Arab Druze to serve in non-combat units.[151] Promoting such a practice in the Baltic States, including the allowance to differentiate assigned roles in the military based on security concerns, could serve to better integrate ethnic Russians with Baltic citizens. In Estonia, despite the limited degree to which it

[149] Aili Vahtla, "Estonia seeking to increase number of conscripts summoned each year," Estonian Public Broadcasting ERR News, 5 December 2017. https://news.err.ee/646782/estonia-seeking-to-increase-number-of-conscripts-summoned-each-year

[150] R. Noack, "The military draft is making a comeback in Europe," *The Washington Post,* 19 October 2018. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/20/18/10/19/military-draft-is-making-comeback-europe/

[151] Mecachem Hofnung. Ethnicity, Religion and Politics in Applying Israel's Conscription Law, *Law and Policy* (Vol 17, Iss 3, 1995), 312.

occurs, such practices are yielding positive results.[152] Additionally, the ability to differentiate roles of conscripts for ethnic Russians could make this policy more politically viable to the policy-makers of the Baltic States.

NATO research has demonstrated that inter-ethnic military conscription has significant impacts in shaping the attitudes of young recruits, who are most often in the highly formative age continuum of 17-20 years, to be more accepting and understanding of their peers from other ethnic groups.[153] Furthermore, this research suggests that military conscription including mixed ethnic identities contributes significantly to the formation of a more cohesive, national identity which exceeds ethno-national identities.[154] If NATO supported the Baltic States in returning to/enhancing military conscription services, not only would their tangible security posture improve, it would pay societal dividends in the long run by better integrating ethnic Russian populations into a greater, national identity. It would likely also boost the confidence of the Baltic States that Russia would not attempt military action against them, the threat of which enhances anti-Russian sentiments and is exacerbated by the very low confidence that the Baltic States hold that NATO would provide military support against Russian aggression.[155]

Another way in which the United States could used international institutions to influence the Baltic States is through European Union standards and practices.

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[152] A. Scrutton & D. Mardiste. "Wary of divided loyalties, a Baltic state reaches out to its Russians." Reuters, 24 Feb 2017. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-baltics-russia/wary-of-divided-loyalties-a-baltic-state-reaches-out-to-its-russians-idUSKBN1630W2

[153] Stephen Nikolov, Integration of the Ethnic Minorities in the Bulgarian Armed Forces, (NATO Research Fellowship Programme, 1995), 35. https://www.nato.int/acad/fellow/95-97/nikolov.pdf

[154] Ibid.

[155] Pew Research Center, "Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe," 10 May 2017, 133. https://www.pewforum.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2017/05/CEUP-FULL-REPORT.pdf

Historically, the legal and political status of ethnic Russians in the Baltic States improves when the states are incentivized or pressured by requirements of the European Union. Improvements in the legal and political rights of ethnic Russians in the Baltic States periodically occurred whenever their governments found it necessary in order to accede to NATO, the European Union and other significant international institutions.[156] As the Baltic States are already members of NATO, the United States would find it difficult, and likely unproductive, to use it as an avenue of approach for this policy. In the EU, however, the Baltic States find their domestic laws and policies are often subject to the rules and standards of the supranational organization. As such, the EU is the most appropriate vehicle through which simultaneous incentives and pressures might be placed upon Baltic States in order to affect changes to improve the language rights, citizenship statuses and quality of life for ethnic Russians residing in the Baltic States. As such, the United States should pursue an aggressive, diplomatic effort to persuade the European Union, and especially its most influential members, to pursue additional rules and requirements in which member states be pressured to further recognize minority languages as additional official languages and to pursue less ethno-centric citizenship standards in order to better integrate their minority populations and reduce the number of "stateless" residents.

There are multiple benefits from pursuing such a policy. First, by improving the rights of ethnic Russians living in the Baltic States, the Russian Federation loses the ability to use the dangerous rhetoric of justification for intervention in order to protect disenfranchised Russian populations in its near abroad. Second, the improvement of

[156] V. Sotirovic. The Russian Minority Question in Estonia. Oriental Review, 2. https://orientalreview.org/2018/11/26/the-russian-minority-question-in-estonia-i/

rights, privileges and general standards of living will bolster the desire of ethnic Russians to continue living in and supporting their adopted homeland which stand in stark contrast to the same criteria in the Russian Federation. Finally, because the Baltic States are members of EU, they are especially subject to its rule-making authority. While their governments would likely bristle at direct diplomatic pressure from the United States to pursue these domestic policies, they would feel pressured and obliged to pursue them if dictated by the European Union.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE SCHOOLS AS VECTORS FOR INTEGRATION

As previously noted, social interaction between members of differing ethnic groups during formative ages are an essential aspect of promoting societal, inter-ethnic integration.[157] In the Baltic States, however, there exists *de facto* segregation within secondary school education because of language differences which is exacerbated by the focus of the Baltic governments in promoting national identity on the basis of using the native Baltic languages as their state *lingua franca*. Instead of forming a cohesive and shared national identity, however, these actions increase inter-ethnic tensions and divisions and foster ethno-linguistic rivalry. While the United States would likely antagonize the Baltic States by directly pressuring them to pursue different domestic policies, it could pursue these policies through grassroots diplomacy. As such, the US State Department should start a development program aimed at constructing and operating public secondary schools in Baltic urban centers in which English is the language of instruction. The benefits of such a policy would be to provide highly desirable education to student bodies which are not ethno-linguistically segregated to

[157] Stephen Nikolov, Integration of the Ethnic Minorities in the Bulgarian Armed Forces, (NATO Research Fellowship Programme, 1995), 35. https://www.nato.int/acad/fellow/95-97/nikolov.pdf

promote societal integration during formative ages. Furthermore, the use of English as a neutral language of communication would have the added benefit in the long term of alleviating the tensions produced by ethno-linguistic loyalties.

The English language has the capability to serve an important role in the integration of multi-ethnic, multi-lingual societies. Researchers have shown alumni from secondary schools which maintained *de facto* segregation due to ethno-linguistic differences maintained far less ethnically diverse social networks from those which attended integrated schools, even long after having left the educational system[158]. Not only does English serve as the world's current *lingua franca*, making English-speaking skills highly valuable for education and commerce, it can simultaneously act as a perceptually "neutral" language in non-English speaking societies and as a tool to remedy *de facto* segregation. In relatively new states which contain diverse ethnic and linguistic communities, such as the Baltic States, there exists the inherent "conflict between loyalty to one's ethnic community and loyalty to the wider national community."[159] In the case of Singapore, researchers found that the use of English as the predominantly instructed language and as the most popular working language has fostered not only inter-ethnic communications but directly influenced the early development of a "supra-ethnic Singapore identity."[160] While the United States can do little to directly influence the Baltic governments to follow the Singapore model or even to mandate all schools and universities use English as the language of instruction, it could support and fund initiatives to build public secondary schools in the Baltic States which instruct only in

[158] Kai Ostwld, Elvin Ong & Dimitar Gueorguiev, "Language Politics, Education, and Ethnic Integration: the Pluralist Dilemma in Singapore," *Politics, Groups, and Identities* (Vol 7, Iss 1, 2017), 89.
[159] Eddie C. Y. Kuo, "Language Policy and Nation-Building in a Multi-Ethnic Society: The Case Singapore Model," (Tokyo: Institute for Japanese Culture and Classics, Kokugakuin University, 1999).
[160] Ibid.

English with the purpose of not only providing an invaluable skill to students but to allow ethnic Russian and ethnic Baltic students to study together and foster inter-ethnic socialization.

This policy would yield multiple benefits for the security of the Baltic States. As previously noted from the research into integration of the Israeli Defense Forces, the success of inter-ethnic integration in mixed societies is highly dependent upon close and sustained personal interactions during the formative years of youth and young adulthood.[161] Such integration would help to diminish the negative impact of Baltic assimilation policies. Additionally, close interaction between ethnic groups will diminish distrust and fears between the populations, reducing the appeal for the governments to implement discriminatory policies. Finally, the relief of societal tensions may result, in the long term, in the Baltic governments pursuing policy changes which prevent Russia from using claims of institutional discrimination against ethnic Russians as a reason for interference.

The operation of public secondary schools with English as the language of instruction would circumvent *de facto* segregation based on ethno-linguistic lines and allow both ethnic Russians and ethnic Baltic students to closely interact with each other on a daily basis during the crucial window in which identity is still forming, allowing for a more cohesive and inclusive national identity in the long-term. By changing such attitudes, future Baltic leaders might be more willing to pursue inclusive policies such as full citizenship for ethnic Russians, the recognition of Russian as an official language, and alleviating some of the negative perceptions towards ethnic Russians. Additionally,

[161] Stephen Nikolov, Integration of the Ethnic Minorities in the Bulgarian Armed Forces, (NATO Research Fellowship Programme, 1995), 35. https://www.nato.int/acad/fellow/95-97/nikolov.pdf

this integration policy could allow more ethnic Russians to view themselves as members within Baltic society, increasing their incentive to support the Baltic States and incorporate them into a supra-ethnic national identity.

REVIVAL OF RUSSIAN LANGUAGE INFORMATION OPERATIONS

The United States must revive Russian language information operations to counter Russian influence in its near abroad. As the research in the previous chapter noted, Latvia and Estonia have actively suppressed the domestic development of Russian-language media and none of the Baltic States have demonstrated willingness to engage with or counter Russian information operations through the Russian language itself. Additionally, traditional media, such as radio and television broadcasts, are no longer sufficient to counter Russian influence in the digital sphere which increasingly includes social media, where active engagement and persistent involvement are necessary to counter Russian information and psychological campaigns. An instruction manual for the Russian Armed Forces articulates that Russia's strategy is "to carry out mass psychological campaigns against the population of a state in order to destabilize society and the government; and force that state to make decisions in the interests of its opponents."[162] Furthermore, despite the acute awareness by the Baltic States of Russian disinformation campaigns, their countermeasures are specifically designed to inform and protect their ethnic majority citizens[163], with little action taken to actively counter

[162] A. Wess Mitchell. "U.S. Strategy Toward the Russian Federation." Testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, 21 August 2018. https://www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/rm/2018/285247.htm
[163] T. Thompson, "Countering Russian disinformation the Baltic nations' way," *The Conversation*, 9 January 2019. https://theconversation.com/countering-russian-disinformation-the-baltic-nations-way-109366

Russian-language information campaigns targeting their ethnic Russian minorities.[164] As such, the United States should create task-force dedicated to digital information operations in the Russian language to actively and quickly engage and counter Russia's information campaign subordinated to the joint US State Department/Department of Defense interagency Russian Influence Group (RIG).

The RIG is a joint working group between the US military's European Command (EUCOM) and the State Department's Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, in which "all 49 U.S. missions located in Europe and Eurasia are required to develop, coordinate, and execute tailored action plans for rebuffing Russian influence operations in their host countries."[165] While the RIG is capable of identifying Russian influence operations and developing/coordinating policy to respond to them and to provide messaging to US allies through its subcomponent Communications Engagement Group,[166] it needs the capability to actively and persistently compete with Russian narratives in the Russian language. This is necessary as current Baltic frameworks for countering Russian propaganda and information operations do not do so in the Russian language and targeting their ethnic Russian minorities, despite their vulnerability to such actions because of their overwhelming reliance upon Russian-language media and primarily interacting within Russian-language information spaces.

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[164] T. Helmus et al., ""Russian Social Media Influence: Understanding Russian Propaganda in Eastern Europe," Rand Corporation, 2018, 65-66.
file:///C:/Users/James/Desktop/Research%20for%20Thesis/RAND_RR2237.pdf

[165] A. Wess Mitchell. "U.S. Strategy Toward the Russian Federation." Testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, 21 August 2018. https://www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/rm/2018/285247.htm

[166] T. Lopez. "Challenging Russian Information Operations Requires Whole-of-Government Approach." Department of Defense. 14 March 2019.
https://dod.defense.gov/News/Article/Article/1785455/challenging-russian-information-operations-requires-whole-of-government-approach/

Additionally, the United States needs to invest more into the production and provision of Russian language media through organizations such as Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. Through the creation of Current Time, a 24/7 Russian-language news channel by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and Voice of America[167], the United States government has made an important first step. Currently, these services provide an alternative point of view for news in the Russian language to that produced by Russian media outlets. However, one of the key issues with their service is that they have little to no entertainment value, which reduces their desirability and, therefore, their penetration with Russian-speaking audiences. For these services to compete in the marketplace of Russian-language media, they must have the funds and capability to produce wide-ranging media which is desirable for its intended audiences for more than news. Additionally, through digital and social media, the consumption of information is no longer primarily through television. While both VoA and RFE/RL have an online presence, they serve primarily as a news alternative for Russian-speaking audiences, and do not have a large and active online community, so these organizations must also grow to develop their own community of active Russian-speakers who engage with other Russian-speakers across cyber mediums.

CHALLENGES FOR THESE POLICIES

Despite the simultaneous security and humanitarian benefits which would result from the implementation of these policies, they are still faced with significant obstacles and hurdles. Several of these policies would require significant involvement of the US State Department, whose anemic budget significantly limits its ability to realize those

[167] Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, "Current Time Network Launches Real News, for Real People, in Real Time," Press Release, 6 February 2017. https://pressroom.rferl.org/a/28285182.html

policies which would require substantial funding. Second, those policies which hinge upon ability of the United States to exert influence through and upon international institutions face two obstacles: the significant diplomatic influence of the United States is not as persuasive when it is not a member of the institution it seeks to influence (such as the EU), and its policy objectives involving NATO would require a shift in strategic thinking concerning the overwhelming preference for professional armed forces over conscription models.

First, the anemic state of funding for the US State Department is a significant, but not unsurmountable, challenge for the implementation of some of the proposed policies. First, the construction and operation of public, English-language secondary schools in the Baltic states would entail not only high initial costs, but enduring costs for the pay of teachers, administrators, maintenance fees, etc. Furthermore, the fact that the highest concentration of ethnic Russians in the Baltic States are large, urban centers will only increase both initial and continuing costs. There are ways to alleviate these costs, however. Wealthy private donors, for example, have previously been instrumental in such enterprises, such as the endowments provided by the Open Society Foundations of philanthropist George Soros in developing Liberal universities and civil society groups in former Soviet states. The United States could also use its substantial influence in international institutions, such as the United Nations, to vector funding towards this benign and altruistic endeavor. Finally, but perhaps most difficult, United States policy makers would likely need to significantly increase the funding of the US State Department to enable it to undertake significant, grassroots diplomatic efforts such as these.

The lack of funding for the US State Department impacts not only the proposal for English-language secondary schools, but significantly impacts its ability to revive its Russian-language information operations. As previously noted, the creation of Current Time, a 24/7 Russian-language news channel by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and Voice of America[168], the United States government has made an important first step. However, through digital and social media, the consumption of information is no longer primarily through television. The US State Department would require significant budgetary increases in order to compete with Russia's disinformation campaign and information operations in the realm of cyberspace. Such an undertaking would require significant resources, including information operators with native-level fluency in Russian, foreign service officers dedicated to planning and managing the campaign, and a robust capability to respond quickly to Russian-produced narratives with professional-level media productions tailored specifically to the Russian populations in the Baltic States. Furthermore, this capability must reside within the US State Department, and cannot be adequately operated by the US Department of Defense, as it requires a purely foreign-policy driven focus, intense and persistent regional and cultural expertise, and dedicated staff not subject to regular changes of station. This is, again, not an entirely insurmountable obstacle. As previously noted, private endowments and funds could provide a significant boon, especially in the production of traditional media by the privately-run Radio Free Europe/Radio Europe enterprise. Additionally, through interagency cooperation efforts such as the Russian Influence Group, the US State Department could take advantage of the significant resources and authorities available

[168] Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, "Current Time Network Launches Real News, for Real People, in Real Time," Press Release, 6 February 2017. https://pressroom.rferl.org/a/28285182.html

through EUCOM. However, to run such tailored and persistent information operations in the cyber arena will necessitate substantial funds come from the US State Department's budget.

Finally, for the US to influence the Baltic States indirectly through international institutions faces obstacles in the degree to which the US is able to influence the policies of the European Union and necessitates a shift in strategic thinking in NATO. Firstly, in the case of NATO, the US is extremely capable in influencing the policies and agendas of the military alliance. The largest obstacle would be the necessity for American NATO leaders to pursue a shift in strategic thinking. The US is a proponent of professionalized military services because of its own military history as well as the benefits it produces in producing effective armed forces which are also more easily interoperable. However, especially for countries which have small populations but face threats from larger powers, the realities of their situation dictate that conscription provides more of a deterrent because it enables them to maintain large inactive reserve forces which can be mobilized in times of a crisis. Sweden, for example, returned to a conscription service for precisely these reasons in 2017. As such, American military leaders will need to accept this nuance in the structure of NATO member states' security needs and support the Baltic States to return to/enhance conscription military models, including to assist in subsidizing the increase of defense spending necessary for such models. Second, the most significant hurdle for the policy of promoting standards within the EU is the variable degrees of penetration that United States diplomacy has to influence the organization's leadership. Despite the close relationship that the United States holds with both the EU itself as well as its array of member states, the United States is a non-member and thus its degree of influence in organizational decision-making of the EU is

significantly limited. As such, United States policy makers will have to pursue sustained diplomatic efforts with the most influential member states of the EU to promote its policy recommendations and will likely need to provide substantial incentives as the proposed EU policies will entail both political and financial costs for EU member states.

CONCLUSION

The Baltic States currently experience the cobra effect regarding their security concerns and solutions to the threat posed by their ethnic Russian populations. Because of persistent Russian threats and a history of exploitation of ethnic Russians living in its near abroad to disrupt states, the Baltic States are wary of their Russian populations. To varying degrees, these fears are realized in the laws, security policies and rhetoric of the Baltic governments which results in an increased vulnerability to Russian influence and interference. This research has revealed that Lithuania is less vulnerable than the other two states, not because its ethnic Russian population is a smaller percentage of its citizenry, but because it has successfully pursued policies which integrated its ethnic Russians into a greater national and societal identity. Latvia and Estonia, however, have pursued policies not of integration but of assimilation, resulting in an increased vulnerability to Russian exploitation of ethnic Russians through both perceived and real issues of disenfranchisement and limitations of rights. As the threat by Russia grew due to its invasion of Georgia and the annexation of Crimea, Latvia and Estonia have taken stricter approaches in their attempts to assimilate their minorities and reduce the influence of their ethnic Russian populations in civil society, making them more vulnerable to Russian influence, propaganda, and as justification for Russian intervention.

The nature of this problem as perpetuated through domestic Baltic State policies has limited the United States from pursuing direct diplomatic influence to reduce this threat, and instead pursue form of military reassurance measures. However, the research has revealed that the Baltic States are not immune from the pressures of international institutions it desires to join or operate within. Furthermore, the United States would be able to pursue grassroots diplomatic measures aimed at supporting long-term societal integration measures for ethnic Russians and the Baltic States' ethnic majorities. Additionally, this research has identified a significant gap in information engagement with ethnic Russians on behalf of both the Baltic States and NATO to counter Russian influence which, if closed, would significantly reduce the threat to the Baltic States.

The security dilemma facing the Baltic States is not one which can be resolved through short-term policy choices. A long history of threat and subjugation by Russia has left the Baltic States fearful of Russian influence, especially in light of Russia's recent adventurism in its near abroad. This threat is only exacerbated by the domestic security policies and responses taken by the Baltic State governments. If the United States wants to reduce the threat posed by Russia to the Baltic States, it must pursue more than military reassurance measures and focus on facilitating the integration of ethnic Russians into their Baltic societies and countering Russia's propaganda and information operations in the Russian language. The cobra effect can only be completely resolved by the Baltic States addressing and changing their own policies, but the United States has an opportunity to promote long-term changes which will fortify its Baltic allies against Russian influence.

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